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A STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY VERSE

BY

THOMAS QUAYLE

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BY

THOMAS QUAYLE

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PREFACE

THE studies on which this book is based were begun during my tenure of the "William Noble" Fellowship in English Literature at the University of Liverpool, and I wish to thank the members of the Fellowship Committee, and especially Professor Elton, under whom I had for two years the great privilege of working, for much valuable advice and criticism. I must also express my sincere obligation to the University for a generous grant towards the cost of publication.

POETIC DICTION

CHAPTER I

THE AGE OF PROSE AND REASON

FROM the time of the publication of the first Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads" (1798) the poetical language of the eighteenth century, or rather of the so-called "classical" writers of the period, has been more or less under a cloud of suspicion. The condemnation which Wordsworth then passed upon it, and even the more rational and penetrating criticism which Coleridge later brought to his own analysis of the whole question of the language fit and proper for poetry, undoubtedly led in the course of the nineteenth century to a definite but uncritical tendency to disparage and underrate the entire poetic output of the period, not only of the Popian supremacy, but even of the interregnum, when the old order was slowly making way for the new. The Romantic rebels of course have nearly always received their meed of praise, but even in their case there is not seldom a suspicion of critical reservation, a sort of implied reproach that they ought to have done better than they did, and that they could and might have done so if they had reacted more violently against the poetic atmosphere of their age. In brief, what with the Preface to the

"Lyrical Ballads" and its successive expansions at the beginning of the century, and what, some eighty years later, with Matthew Arnold's calm description of the eighteenth century as an "age of prose and reason," the poetry of that period, and not only the neo-classical portion of it, fared somewhat badly. There could be no better illustration of the influence and danger of labels and tags; "poetic diction," and "age of prose and reason" tended to become a sort of critical legend or tradition, by means of which eighteenth century verse, alike at its highest and its lowest levels, could be safely and adequately understood and explained.

Nowadays we are little likely to fall into the error of assuming that any one cut and dried formula, however pregnant and apt, could adequately sum up the literary aspects and characteristics of an entire age; the contributory and essential factors are too many, and often too elusive, for the tabloid method. And now that the poetry of the first half or so of the eighteenth century is in process of rehabilitation, and more than a few of its practitioners have even been allowed access to the slopes, at least, of Parnassus, it may perhaps be useful to examine, a little more closely than has hitherto been customary, one of the critical labels which, it would almost seem, has sometimes been taken as a sort of generic description of eighteenth century verse, as if "poetic diction" was something which suddenly sprang into being when Pope translated Homer, and had never been heard of before or since.

This, of course, is to overstate the case, the more so as it can hardly be denied that there is much to be said for the other side. It may perhaps be put this way, by saying, at the risk of a laborious assertion of the obvious, that if poetry is to be written there must be a diction in which to write it—a diction which,

whatever its relation to the language of contemporary speech or prose may be, is yet in many essential respects distinct and different from it, in that, even when it does not draw upon a special and peculiar word-power of its own, yet so uses or combines common speech as to heighten and intensify its possibilities of suggestion and evocation. If, therefore, we speak of the "poetic diction" of the eighteenth century, or of any portion of it, the reference ought to be, of course, to the whole body of language in which the poetry of that period is written, viewed as a medium, good, bad, or indifferent, for poetical expression. But this has rarely or never been the case; it is not too much to say that, thanks to Wordsworth's attack and its subsequent reverberations, "poetic diction," so far as the eighteenth century is concerned, has too often been taken to mean, "bad poetic diction," and it has been in this sense indiscriminately applied to the whole poetic output of Pope and his school.

In the present study it is hoped, by a careful examination of the poetry of the eighteenth century, by an analysis of the conditions and species of its diction, to arrive at some estimate of its value, of what was good and what was bad in it, of how far it was the outcome of the age which produced it, and how far a continuation of inherited tradition in poetic language, to what extent writers went back to their great predecessors in their search for a fresh vocabulary, and finally, to what extent the poets of the triumphant Romantic reaction, who had to fashion for themselves a new vehicle of expression, were indebted to their forerunners in the revolt, to those who had helped to prepare the way.

It is proposed to make the study both a literary and a linguistic one. In the first place, the aim will be to show how the poetic language, which is usually labelled "the eighteenth century style," was, in

certain of its most pronounced aspects, a reflex of the literary conditions of its period; in the second place, the study will be a linguistic one, in that it will deal also with the words themselves. Here the attention will be directed to certain features characteristic of, though not peculiar to, the diction of the eighteenth century poetry—the use of Latinisms, of archaic and obsolete words, and of those compound words by means of which English poets from the time of the Elizabethans have added some of the happiest and most expressive epithets to the language; finally, the employment of abstractions and personifications will be discussed.

CHAPTER II

THE THEORY OF POETICAL DICTION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

ABOUT the time when Dryden was beginning his literary career the preoccupation of men of letters with the language as a literary instrument was obvious enough. There was a decided movement toward simplicity in both prose and poetry, and, so far as the latter was concerned, it was in large measure an expression of the critical reaction against the " metaphysical " verse commonly associated with the names of Donne and his disciples. Furetière in his " Nouvelle Allegorique ou Histoire des derniers troubles arrivez au Royaume d'Eloquence," published at Paris in 1658,[1] expresses the parallel struggle which had been raging amongst French poets and critics, and the allegory he presents may be taken to symbolize the general critical attitude in both countries.

Rhetoric, Queen of the Realm of Eloquence, and her Prime Minister, Good Sense, are represented as threatened by innumerable foes. The troops of the Queen, marshalled in defence of the Academy, her citadel, are the accepted literary forms, Histories, Epics, Lyrics, Dramas, Romances, Letters, Sermons, Philosophical Treatises, Translations, Orations, and the like. Her enemies are the rhetorical figures and

[1] A brief summary, which is here utilized, is given by Spingarn, " Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century," I, Intro. xxxvi, foll. (Oxford, 1908).

the perversions of style, Metaphors, Hyperboles, Similes, Descriptions, Comparisons, Allegories, Pedantries, Antitheses, Puns, Exaggerations, and a host of others. Ultimately the latter are defeated, and are in some cases banished, or else agree to serve as dependents in the realm of Eloquence.

We may interpret the struggle thus allegorically expressed by saying that a new age, increasingly scientific and rational in its outlook, felt it was high time to analyze critically and accurately the traditional canons and ideals of form and matter that classical learning, since the Renaissance, had been able to impose upon literature. This is not to say that seventeenth century writers and critics suddenly decided that all the accepted standards were radically wrong, and should be thrown overboard; but some of them at least showed and expressed themselves dissatisfied, and, alongside of the unconscious and, as it were, instinctive changes that reflected the spirit of the age, there were deliberate efforts to re-fashion both the matter and the manner of literary expression, to give creative literature new laws and new ideals.[1]

The movement towards purity and simplicity of expression received its first definite statement in Thomas Sprat's "History of the Royal Society, 1667." One section of the History contains an account of the French Academy, and Sprat's efforts were directed towards the formation of a similar body in England as an arbiter in matters of language and style. The ideal was to be the expression of "so many *things*

[1] *Vide* Spingarn, *op. cit.*, *Intro.* XXXVI–XLVIII; and also Robertson, "Studies in the Genesis of Romantic Theory in the XVIIIth Century" (Cambridge, 1924), an attempt "to show that the Movement which led to the dethronement of Reason, in favour of the Imagination, chief arbiter in poetic creation, and which culminated with Goethe and Schiller in Germany and the Romantic Revival in England, is to be put to the credit not of ourselves, but of Italy, who thus played again that pioneer rôle which she had already played in the sixteenth century."

almost in an equal number of *words*."[1] A Committee of the Royal Society, which included Dryden, Evelyn, and Sprat amongst its members, had already met in 1664, to discuss ways and means of "improving the English tongue," and it was the discussions of this committee which had doubtless led up to Evelyn's letter to Sir Peter Wyche, its chairman, in June 1665.[2] Evelyn there gives in detail his ideas of what an English academy, acting as arbiter in matters of vocabulary and style, might do towards purifying the language. Twenty-three years later Joseph Glanvill defined the new ideal briefly in a passage of his "Essay Concerning Preaching": "Plainness is a character of great latitude and stands in opposition, First to *hard words*: Secondly, to *deep and mysterious notions*: Thirdly, to *affected Rhetorications*: and Fourthly, to *Phantastical Phrases*."[3] In short, the ideal to be aimed at was the precise and definite language of experimental science, but the trend of the times tended to make it more and more that ideal of poetry also which was later to be summed up in Dryden's definition of "wit" as a "propriety of thoughts and words."[4]

It is of some little interest perhaps to note that it is not until the end of the seventeenth century that the word *diction* definitely takes on the sense which it now usually bears as a term of literary criticism. In the preface to "Sylvae, or The Second Part of Poetical Miscellanies" (1685), Dryden even seems to regard the term as not completely naturalized.[5] Moreover, the critics and poets of the eighteenth century were for

[1] Spingarn, *op. cit.*, II, p. 118.
[2] *Ibid.*, II, p. 310.
[3] *Ibid.*, II, p. 273.
[4] "Apology for Heroic Poetry": "Essays of John Dryden," ed. W. P. Ker (1909), Vol. I, p. 190.
[5] "There appears in every part of his [Horace's] diction, or (to speak English) in all his expressions, a kind of noble and bold purity."—*Ibid.*, p. 266.

the most part quite convinced that the special language of poetry had begun with Dryden. Johnson asserted this in his usual dogmatic fashion, and thus emphasized the doctrine, afterwards vigorously opposed by Wordsworth, that between the language of prose, and that proper to poetry, there is a sharp distinction. "There was therefore before the time of Dryden no poetical diction. . . . Those happy combinations of words which distinguished poetry from prose had been rarely attempted; we had few elegancies or flowers of speech."[1] Gray moreover, while agreeing that English poetry had now a language of its own, declared in a letter to West that this special language was the creation of a long succession of English writers themselves, and especially of Shakespeare and Milton, to whom (he asserts) Pope and Dryden were greatly indebted.[2]

It is not very difficult to understand Dryden's own attitude, as laid down in the various Prefaces. He is quite ready to subscribe to the accepted neo-classical views on the language of poetry, but characteristically reserves for himself the right to reject them, or to take up a new line, if he thinks his own work, or that of his contemporaries, is likely to benefit thereby. Thus in the preface to "Annus Mirabilis" (1666) he boldly claims the liberty to coin words on Latin models, and to make use of technical details.[3] In his apology for "Heroic Poetry and Poetic License" (1677) prefixed to "The State of Innocence and Fall of Man," his operatic "tagging" of "Paradise Lost," he seems to lay down distinctly the principle that poetry demands a medium of its own, distinct from that of prose,[4]

[1] "Lives": Dryden, ed. G. B. Hill (1905), Vol. I, p. 420; and cp. Goldsmith, "Poetry Distinguished from other Writing" (Miscellaneous Works), 1821, Vol. IV, p. 381 foll.

[2] "Letters" (To R. West), 1742, ed. Tovey (1900); Vol. II, pp. 97-8.

[3] Ker, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 17-8.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 188 foll.

whilst towards the end of his literary career he reiterates his readiness to enrich his poetic language from any and every source, for " poetry requires ornament," and he is therefore willing to " trade both with the living and the dead for the enrichment of our native language."[1] But it is significant that at the same time he rejects the technical terms he had formerly advocated, apparently on the grounds that such terms would be unfamiliar to " men and ladies of the first quality." Dryden has thus become more " classical," in the sense that he has gone over or reverted to the school of " general " terms, which appeared to base its ideal of expression on the accepted language of cultured speakers and writers.[2]

Toward the establishment of this principle of the pseudo-classical creed the theory and practice of Pope naturally contributed; indeed, it has been claimed that it was in large measure the result of the profound effect of the " Essay on Criticism," or at least of the current of thought which it represents, on the taste of the age.[3] In the Essay, Pope, after duly enumerating the various " idols " of taste in poetical thought and diction, clearly states his own doctrine; as the poets' aim was the teaching of " True Wit " or " Nature," the language used must be universal and general, and neologisms must be regarded as heresies. For Pope, as for Dryden, universal and general language meant such as would appeal to the cultured society for whom he wrote,[4] and in his practice he thus reflected the

[1] Ker, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 234.

[2] Edward Young, the author of " Night Thoughts," was later to express this tersely enough: " Words tarnished, by passing through the mouths of the vulgar, are laid aside as inelegant and obsolete— " Conjectures on Original Composition," 1759 (" English Critical Essays," Oxford, 1922, p. 320).

[3] Pope's Works, ed. Courthope and Elwin: " Life," Vol. V, p. 69.

[4] That is to say, as Mr. John Drinkwater has recently put it, it was " the common language, but raised above the common pitch, of the coffee-houses and boudoirs."—" Victorian Poetry," 1923, pp. 30–32.

traditional attitude towards the question of language as a vehicle of literary expression. A common "poetics" drawn and formulated by the classical scholars mainly (and often incorrectly) from Aristotle had established itself throughout Western Europe, and it professed to prescribe the true relation which should exist between form and matter, between the creative mind and the work of art.[1]

The critical reaction against these traditional canons had, as we have noted, already begun, but Pope and his contemporaries are in the main supporters of the established order, in full agreement with its guiding principle that the imitation of "Nature" should be the chief aim and end of art. It is scarcely necessary to add that it was not "Nature" in the Wordsworthian sense that was thus to be "imitated"; sometimes, indeed, it is difficult to discover what was meant by the term. But for Pope and his followers we usually find it to mean man as he lives his life in this world, and the phrase to "imitate Nature" might thus have an ethical purpose, signifying the moral "improvement" of man.

But to appreciate the full significance of this "doctrine," and its eighteenth century interpretation, it is necessary to glance at the Aristotelian canon in which it had its origin. For Aristotle poetry was an objective "imitation" with a definite plan or purpose, of human actions, not as they are, but as they ought to be. The ultimate aim, then, according to the *Poetics*, is ideal truth, stripped of the local and the accidental; Nature is to be improved upon with means drawn from Nature herself. This theory, as extracted and interpreted by the Italian and French critics of the Renaissance, was early twisted into a notion of poetry as an agreeable falsity, and by the end of the seventeenth century it had come to mean, especially

[1] *Vide* Elton, "The Augustan Ages," 1889, pp. 419 foll.

with the French, the imitation of a selected and embellished Nature, not directly, but rather through the medium of those great writers of antiquity, such as Homer and Virgil, whose works provided the received and recognized models of idealized nature.[1]

As a corollary to this interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of ideal imitation, there appeared a tendency to ignore more and more the element of personal feeling in poetry,[2] and to concentrate attention on the formal elements of the art. This tendency, reinforced by the authority of the Horatian tag, *ut pictura poesis* ("as is painting, so is poetry"), led naturally, and in an ever-increasing degree, to the formal identification of poetry with painting. Critics became accustomed to discussing the elements in the art of writing that correspond to the other elements in pictorial art, such as light, colour, expression, etc. And as the poet was to be an imitator of accepted models, so also he was to be imitative and traditional in using poetical colouring, in which phrase were included, as Dryden wrote, "the words, the expressions, the tropes and figures, the versification, and all the other elegancies of sound."[3] That this parallelism directly encourages the growth of a set "poetic diction" is obvious; the poet's language was not to be a reflection of a genuine emotion felt in the mind; for his words, phrases, and figures of speech, his *operum colores*,[4] he must not look to Nature but to

[1] Cp. "Essay on Criticism," I, ll. 130–140.

[2] John Dennis, of course, at the beginning of the century, is to be found pleading that "passion is the chief thing in poetry" ("The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry," 1701); but it is to be feared that he is only, so to speak, ringing the changes on the Rules.

[3] "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting," ed. Ker, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 147.

[4] "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting," Ker, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 148. "*Operum Colores* is the very word which Horace uses to signify words and elegant expressions," etc.

models. In brief, a poetical *gradus*, compiled from accepted models, was to be the ideal source on which the poet was to draw for his medium of expression.

It is not necessary to dwell long on this pseudo-classical confusion of the two arts, as revealed in the critical writings of Western Europe down to the very outbreak of the Romantic revolt.[1] In English criticism, Dryden's " Parallel " was only one of many. Of the eighteenth century English critics who developed a detailed parallelism between pictorial and plastic art on the one hand and poetry on the other, maintaining that their standards were interchangeable, the most important perhaps is Spence, whose " Polymetis " appeared in 1747, and who sums the general position of his fellow-critics on this point in the remark, " Scarce anything can be good in a poetical description which would appear absurd if represented in a statue or picture."[2] The ultimate outcome of this confusion of poetry and painting found its expression in the last decade of the eighteenth century in the theory and practice of Erasmus Darwin, whose work, " The Botanic Garden," consisted of a " second part," " The Loves of the Plants," published in 1789, two years before its inclusion with the " first part " the " Economy of Vegetation," in one volume. Darwin's theory of poetry is contained in the " Interludes " between the cantos of his poems, which take the form of dialogues between the " Poet " and a " Bookseller." In the Interlude to Canto 1 of Part II (" The Loves of the Plants ") he maintains the thesis that poetry is a process of painting to the eye, and in the cantos themselves he proceeds with great zeal to show in practice

[1] Lessing's " Laokoon," which appeared in 1766, may in this, as in other connexions, be regarded as the first great Romantic manifesto. The limitations of poetry and the plastic arts were analysed, and the fundamental conditions to which each art must adhere, if it is to accomplish its utmost, were definitely and clearly laid down.

[2] " Polymetis " (1747), p. 311.

how words and images should be laid on like pigments from the outside. The young Wordsworth himself, as his early poems show, was influenced by the theory and practice of Darwin, but Coleridge was not slow to detect the danger of the elaborate word-painting that might arise from the confusion of the two arts. "The poet," he wrote,[1] "should paint to the Imagination and not to the Fancy." For Coleridge Fancy was the "Drapery" of poetic genius, Imagination was its "Soul" or its "synthetic and magical power," [2] and he thus emphasized what may be regarded as one of the chief distinctions between the pseudo-classical, and the romantic, interpretations of the language of poetry. In its groping after the "grand style," as reflected in a deliberate avoidance of accidental and superficial "particularities," and in its insistence on generalized or abstract forms, eighteenth century poetry, or at least the "neo-classical" portion of it, reflected its inability to achieve that intensity of imaginative conception which is the supreme need of all art.

The confusion between the two arts of poetry and painting which Coleridge thus condemned did not, it is needless to say, disappear with the eighteenth century. The Romanticists themselves finally borrowed that much-abused phrase "local colour" from the technical vocabulary of the painter, and in other respects the whole question became merged in the symbolism of the nineteenth century where literature is to be seen attempting to do the work of both music and painting.[3]

As regards the language of poetry then—its

[1] "Biographia Literaria," Chap. XXII.

[2] *Ibid.*, Chap. IV.

[3] *Vide* especially Babbitt, "The New Laocoon, An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts" (1910), to which these paragraphs are indebted; and for a valuable survey of the relations of English poetry with painting and with music, see "English Poetry in Its Relation to Painting and the other Arts," by Laurence Binyon (London, 1919), especially pp. 15–19.

vocabulary, the actual *words* in which it was to be given expression—the early eighteenth century had first this pseudo-classical doctrine of a treasury of select words, phrases, and other "ornaments," a doctrine which was to receive splendid emphasis and exemplification in Pope's translation of Homer. But alongside of this ideal of style there was another ideal which Pope again, as we have seen, had insisted upon in his "Essay on Criticism," and which demanded that the language of poetry should in general conform to that of cultivated conversation and prose. These two ideals of poetical language can be seen persisting throughout the eighteenth century, though later criticism, in its haste to condemn the *gradus* ideal, has not often found time to do justice to the other.

But, apart from these general considerations, the question of poetic diction is rarely treated as a thing *per se* by the writers who, after Dryden or Pope, or alongside of them, took up the question. There are no attempts, in the manner of the Elizabethans,[1] to conduct a critical inquiry into the actual present resources of the vernacular, and its possibilities as a vehicle of expression. Though the attention is more than once directed to certain special problems, on the whole the discussions are of a general nature, and centre round such points as the language suitable for an Heroic Poem, or for the "imitation" of aspects of nature, or for Descriptive Poetry, questions which had been discussed from the sixteenth century onwards, and were not exhausted by the time of Dr. Johnson.[2]

Goldsmith's remarks, reflecting as they do a sort of

[1] *Vide* "Elizabethan Critical Essays," ed. Gregory Smith, Vol. I, Intro. (Oxford, 1904).

[2] *Vide*, e.g., Addison, "Spectator" papers on "Paradise Lost" (No. 285, January 26, 1712).

half-way attitude between the old order and the new, are interesting. Poetry has a language of its own; it is a species of painting with words, and hence he will not condemn Pope for "deviating in some instances from the simplicity of Homer," whilst such phrases as *the sighing reed, the warbling rivulet, the gushing spring, the whispering breeze* are approvingly quoted.[1] It is thus somewhat surprising to find that in his "Life of Parnell" he had pilloried certain "misguided innovators" to whose efforts he attributed the gradual debasing of poetical language since the happy days when Dryden, Addison, and Pope had brought it to its highest pitch of refinement.[2] These writers had forgotten that poetry is "the language of life" and that the simplest expression was the best: brief statements which, if we knew what Goldsmith meant by "life," would seem to adumbrate the theories which Wordsworth was to expound as the Romantic doctrine.

Dr. Johnson has many things to say on the subject of poetic language, including general remarks and particular judgments on special points, or on the work of the poets of whom he treated in his "Lives." As might be expected, he clings tenaciously to the accepted standards of neo-classicism, and repeats the old commonplaces which had done duty for so long, pays the usual tribute to Waller and Denham, but ascribes the actual birth of poetical diction to the practice of Dryden. What Johnson meant by "poetical diction" is clearly indicated; it was a "system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to different arts,"[3] that is, the language of poetry must

[1] Essay, "Poetry Distinguished from other Writing" (Miscellaneous Works, 1820, Vol. IV, pp. 408-14).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[3] "Lives," Hill, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 420.

shun popular and technical words, since language is "the dress of thought" and "splendid ideas lose their magnificence if they are conveyed by low and vulgar words."[1] From this standpoint, and reinforced by his classical preference for regular rhymes,[2] all his particular judgments of his predecessors and contemporaries were made; and when this is remembered it is easier to understand, for instance, his praise of Akenside[3] and his criticism of Collins.[4]

Gray, however, perhaps the most scrupulous and precise of all our poets with regard to the use of words in poetry,[5] has some pertinent things to say on the matter. There is his important letter to West, already referred to, with its dogmatic assertion that "the language of the age is never the language of poetry," and that "our poetry has a language to itself," an assertion which, with other remarks of Gray, helps to emphasize the distinction to be made between the two ideals of poetical diction to be seen persisting through the eighteenth century. It was generally agreed that there must be a special language for poetry, with all its artificial "heightening," "licenses," and variations from the language of prose, to serve the purpose of the traditional "Kinds," especially the Epic and the Lyric. This is the view taken by Gray, but with a difference. He does not accept the

[1] "Lives": Cowley; cp. "The Rambler," No. 158.

[2] Cp. Boswell's "Life" (1851 edition), Vol. I, p. 277: "He enlarged very convincingly upon the excellence of rhyme over blank verse in English poetry"; also *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 84.

[3] "Lives," ed. Hill, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 416 foll.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 341.

[5] This is of course exemplified in his own poetic practice, and it has been held sufficient to explain the oft-debated scantiness of his literary production. But for remarkable examples of his minuteness and scrupulosity in the matter of poetic diction see the letter to West referred to above; to Mason, January 13, 1758 (Tovey, *op. cit.*, II, p. 12), and to Beattie, March 8, 1771 (*ibid.*, II, p. 305).

conventional diction which Pope's "Homer" had done so much to perpetuate, and hence he creates a poetic language of his own, a glittering array of words and phrases, blending material from varied sources, and including echoes and reminiscences of Milton and Dryden.

The second ideal of style was that of which, as we have seen, the canons had been definitely stated by Pope, and which had been splendidly exemplified in the satires, essays, and epistles. The aim was to reproduce "the colloquial idiom of living society,[1] and the result was a plain, unaffected style, devoid of the ornaments of the poetic language proper, and, in its simplicity and directness, equally suitable for either poetry or prose. Gray could make use of this vehicle of expression, whenever, as in "The Long Story," or the fragmentary "Alliance of Education and Government," it was suitable and adequate for his purpose; but in the main his own practice stood distinct from both the eighteenth century ideals of poetical language. Hence, as it conformed to neither of the accepted standards, Goldsmith and Johnson agreed in condemning his diction, which was perhaps in itself sufficient proof that Gray had struck out a new language for himself.

Among the special problems connected with the diction of poetry to which the eighteenth century critics directed their attention, that of the use of archaic and obsolete words was prominent. It had been one of the methods by which the Elizabethans had hoped to enrich their language, but contemporary critics had expressed their disapproval, and it was left to Jonson, in this as in other similar matters, to express the reasonable view that "the eldest of

[1] Cp. Courthope, "History of English Poetry," Vol. V, pp. 218 foll.

the present and the newest of the past language is best."[1] Dryden, when about to turn the "Canterbury Tales" "into our language as it is now refined,"[2] was to express a similar common-sense view. "When an ancient word," he said, with his Horace no doubt in his mind, "for its sound and significancy deserves to be revived, I have that reasonable veneration for antiquity to restore it. All beyond this is superstition."

A few years later the long series of Spenserian imitations had begun, so that the question of the poetic use of archaic and obsolete words naturally came into prominence. Pope, as might be expected, is to be found among the opposition, and in the "Dunciad" he takes the opportunity of showing his contempt for this kind of writing by a satiric gird, couched in supposedly archaic language:

> But who is he in closet close y-pent
> Of sober face with learned dust besprent?
> Right well mine eyes arede the myster wight
> On parchment scraps y-fed and Wormius hight—
> (Bk. III, ll. 185-8)

an attack which is augmented by the ironic comment passed by "Scriblerus" in a footnote.[3] Nevertheless, when engaged on his translation of Homer he had an inclination, like Cowper, towards a certain amount of archaism, though it is evident that he is not altogether satisfied on the point.[4]

In Gray's well-known letter to West, mentioned above, there is given a selection of epithets from Dryden, which he notes as instances of archaic words

[1] *Vide* "Elizabethan Critical Essays," *op. cit.*, Intro., pp. LV–LX.

[2] Preface to the "Fables," Ker, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 266-67.

[3] *Vide* Works, ed. Elwin and Courthope, Vol. II.

[4] *Vide* "Translation of Homer," ed. Buckley, Intro., p. 47: and cp. "The Guardian," No. 78, "A Receipt to make an Epic Poem."

preserved in poetry. Gray, as we know, had a keen sense of the value of words, and his list is therefore of special importance, for it appears to show that words like *mood*, *smouldering*, *beverage*, *array*, *wayward*, *boon*, *foiled*, etc., seemed to readers of 1742 much more old-fashioned than they do to us. Thirty years or so later he practically retracts the views expressed in this earlier letter, in which he had admirably defended the use in poetry of words obsolete in the current language of the day. "I think," he wrote to James Beattie, criticizing "The Minstrel,[1] "that we should wholly adopt the language of Spenser or wholly renounce it." And he goes on to object to such words as *fared*, *meed*, *sheen*, etc., objections which were answered by Beattie, who showed that all the words had the sanction of such illustrious predecessors as Milton and Pope, and who added that "the poetical style in every nation abounds in old words"—exactly what Gray had written in his letter of 1742.

Johnson, it need hardly be said, was of Pope's opinion on this matter, and the emphatic protest which he, alarmed by such tendencies in the direction of Romanticism, apparent not only in the Spenserian imitations, but still more in such signs of the times as were to culminate in Percy's "Reliques," the Ossianic "simplicities" of Macpherson, and the Rowley "forgeries," is evidence of the strength which the Spenserian revival had by then gained. "To imitate Spenser's fiction and sentiments can incur no reproach," he wrote: "but I am very far from extending the same respect to his diction and his stanza."[2] To the end he continued to express his disapproval of those who favoured the "obsolete style," and, like Pope, he

[1] Tovey, *op. cit.*, March 8, 1771 (Vol. II, pp. 305 foll.); Beattie's comments are given by Tovey, *ibid.*, footnotes.

[2] "Rambler," No. 121, May 14, 1751.

finally indulges in a metrical fling at the innovators :

> Phrase that time has flung away
> Uncouth words in disarray ;
> Tricked in antique ruff and bonnet,
> Ode and Elegy and Sonnet.[1]

Goldsmith too had his misgivings. " I dislike the imitations of our old English poets in general," he wrote with reference to " The Schoolmistress," " yet, on this minute subject, the antiquity of the style produces a very ludicrous solemnity."[2]

On this matter of poetic archaism, the point of view of the average cultured reader, as distinct from the writer, is probably accurately represented in one of Chesterfield's letters. Writing to his son,[3] he was particularly urgent that those words only should be employed which were found in the writers of the Augustan age, or of the age immediately preceding. To enforce his point he carefully explained to the boy the distinction between the pedant and the gentleman who is at the same time a scholar ; the former affected rare words found only in the pages of obscure or antiquated authors rather than those used by the great classical writers.

This was the attitude adopted in the main by William Cowper, who, after an early enthusiasm for the " quaintness " of old words, when first engaged on his translation of Homer, later repented and congratulated himself on having, in his last revisal, pruned away every " single expression of the obsolete kind."[4]

[1] " Lines written in Imitation of Certain Poems Published in 1777 " ; and cp. William Whitehead's " Charge to the Poets " (1762), which may be taken to reflect the various attitudes of the reading public towards the " revivals."—(" Poets of Great Britain," 1794, Vol. XI, pp. 935-7.)

[2] Works (1820), *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 124.

[3] September 27, 1788 (" Letters," 4 vols, 1806, Vol. II, p. 106).

[4] Letter to Lady Hesketh, March 22, 1790 (" Correspondence of William Cowper - Arranged in Chronological Order by T. Wright," 4 vols., 1904).—Vol. III, pp. 446, foll.

But against these opinions we have to set the frankly romantic attitude of Thomas Warton, who, in his "Observations on the Faerie Queen" (1754), boldly asserts that "if the critic is not satisfied, yet the reader is transported," whilst he is quite confident that Spenser's language is not so difficult and obsolete as it is generally supposed to be.[1]

Here and there we also come across references to other devices by which the poet is entitled to add to his word-power. Thus Addison grants the right of indulging in coinages, since this is a practice sanctioned by example, especially by that of Homer and Milton.[2] Pope considered that only such of Homer's compound epithets as could be "done literally into English without destroying the purity of our language" or those with good literary sanctions should be adopted.[3] Gray, however, enters a caveat against coinages; in the letter to Beattie, already quoted, he objects to the word "infuriated," and adds a warning not to "make new words without great necessity; it is very hazardous at best."

Finally, as a legacy or survival of that veneration for the "heroic poem," which had found its latest expression in Davenant's "Preface to Gondibert"[4] (1650), the question of technical words is occasionally touched upon. Dryden, who had begun by asserting that general terms were often a mere excuse for ignorance, could later give sufficient reasons for the avoidance of technical terms,[5] and it is not surprising to find that Gray was of a similar opinion. In his

[1] 1807 ed., Vol. I, pp. 21 and 24; cp. also Campbell, "The Philosophy of Rhetoric" (London, 1776), Vol. I, pp. 410-411.

[2] "Spectator," 285, January 26, 1712.

[3] "Homer"; ed. Buckley, Intro., 49.

[4] Spingarn, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 1–51; for Hobbes "Answer," and Cowley's "Preface to Poems," see *ibid*, pp. 54–90.

[5] "Dedication of the Æneis," Ker, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 154, foll.; cp. Addison, "Spectator," 297, January 9, 1712.

criticism of Beattie's "Minstrel" he objects to the terms *medium* and *incongruous* as being words of art, which savour too much of prose. Gray, we may presume, did not object to such words because they were not "elegant," or even mainly because they were "technical" expressions. He would reject them because, for him, with his keen sense of the value of words, they were too little endowed with poetic colour and imagination. When these protests are remembered, the great and lasting popularity of "The Shipwreck" (1762) of William Falconer, with its free employment of nautical words and phrases, may be considered to possess a certain significance in the history of the Romantic reaction. The daring use of technical terms in the poem must have given pleasure to a generation of readers accustomed mainly to the conventional words and phrases of the accepted diction.

When we review the "theory" of poetical language in the eighteenth century, as revealed in the sayings, direct and indirect, of poets and critics, we feel that there is little freshness or originality in the views expressed, very little to suggest the changes that were going on underneath, and which were soon to find their first great and reasoned expression. Nominally, it would seem that the views of the eighteenth century "classicists" were adequately represented and summed up in those of Johnson, for whom the ideal of poetical language was that which Dryden had "invented," and of which Pope had made such splendid use in his translation of Homer. In reality, the practice of the "neo-classical" poets was largely influenced by the critical tenets of the school to which they belonged, especially by that pseudo-Aristotelian doctrine according to which poetry was to be an "imitation" of the best models, whilst its words, phrases, and similes were to be such as were generally accepted and conse-

crated by poetic use. It was this conventionalism, reinforced by, as well as reflecting, the neo-classical outlook on external nature, that resulted in the "poetic diction" which Wordsworth attacked, and it is important to note that a similar stereotyped language is to be found in most of the contemporary poetry of Western Europe, and especially in that of France.[1]

We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that neither Johnson, nor any of his "classical" contemporaries, appears to attach any importance to the fact that Pope in his essays and epistles had set up a standard of diction, of which it is not too much to say that it was an ideal vehicle of expression for the thoughts and feelings it had to convey. So enamoured were they of the pomp and glitter of the "Homer" that they apparently failed to see in this real "Pope style" an admirable model for all writers aiming at lucidity, simplicity, and directness of thought. We may see this clearly by means of an instructive comparison of Johnson's judgments on the two "Pope styles." "It is remarked by Watts," he writes, "that there is scarcely a happy combination of words or a phrase poetically elegant in the English language which Pope has not inserted into his version of Homer."[2] On the other hand, he is perhaps more than unjust to Pope's plain didactic style when he speaks of the "harshness of diction," the "levity without elegance" of the "Essay on Man."[3]

It was not until the neo-classical poetry was in its death-agony that we meet with adequate appreciation of the admirable language which Pope brought to perfection and bequeathed to his successors. "The

[1] *Vide*, e.g., E. Barat, "Le Style poétique et la Révolution Romantique" (Paris, 1904), pp. 5–35.

[2] "Lives of the Poets. Pope," ed. Birbeck Hill, Vol. III, p. 251.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

familiar style," wrote Cowper to Unwin,[1] " is of all the styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic—to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake." The " familiar style," which Cowper here definitely characterizes, was in its own special province as good a model as was the beautiful simplicity of Blake when " poetical poetry " had once more come into its own ; and it is important to remember that this fact received due recognition from both Wordsworth and Coleridge. " The mischief," wrote the former,[2] " was effected not by Pope's satirical and moral pieces, for these entitle him to the highest place among the poets of his class ; it was by his ' Homer.' . . . No other work in the language so greatly vitiated the diction of English poetry." And Coleridge, too, called attention to the " almost faultless position and choice of words " in Pope's original compositions, in comparison with the absurd " pseudo-poetic diction " of his translations of Homer.[3] The " Pope style " failed to produce real poetry—poetry of infinite and universal appeal, animated with personal feeling and emotion, not merely because of its preference for the generic rather than the typical, but because its practitioners for the most part lacked those qualities of intense imagination in which alone the highest art can have its birth.

[1] January 17, 1782 (Wright, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 429-30).
[2] Prose Works, ed. Grosart, Vol. II, pp. 101 foll.
[3] " Biographia Literaria," ed. Shawcross (1907), p. 26, Note ; cp. also Southey, " Works of Cowper " (1884 edition), Vol. I, p. 313.

CHAPTER III

THE "STOCK" DICTION OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

SINCE the time when Wordsworth launched his manifestoes on the language fit and proper for poetry, it may almost be said that whenever the term "poetic diction" is found used as a more or less generic term of critical disparagement, it has been with reference, implied or explicit, to the so-called classical poetry of the Augustan ages. But the condemnation has perhaps been given too wide an application, and hence there has arisen a tendency to place in this category all the language of all the poets who were supposed to have taken Pope as their model, so that "the Pope style" and "eighteenth century diction" have almost become synonymous terms, as labels for a lifeless, imitative language in which poets felt themselves constrained to express all their thoughts and feelings. This criticism is both unjust and misleading. For when this "false and gaudy splendour" is unsparingly condemned, it is not always recognized or remembered that it is mainly to be found in the descriptive poetry of the period.

It is sufficient to glance at the descriptive verse of practically all the typical "classical" poets to discover how generally true this statement is. We cannot say, of course, that the varied sights and sounds of outdoor life made no appeal at all to them; but what we do feel is that whenever they were constrained to indulge

in descriptive verse they either could not, or would not, try to convey their impressions in language of their very own, but were content in large measure to draw upon a common stock of dead and colourless epithets. Local colour, in the sense of accurate and particular observation of natural facts, is almost entirely lacking; there is no writing with the eye on the object, and it has been well remarked that their highly generalized descriptions could be transferred from poet to poet or from scene to scene, without any injustice. Thus Shenstone [1] describes his birthplace:

> Romantic scenes of pendent hills
> And verdant vales, and falling rills,
> And mossy banks, the fields adorn
> Where Damon, simple swain, was born—

a quatrain which, with little or no change of epithet, was the common property of the versifiers, and may be met with almost everywhere in early eighteenth century poetry. Every type of English scenery and every phase of outdoor life finds its description in lines of this sort, where the reader instinctively feels that the poet has not been careful to record his individual impressions or emotions, but has contented himself with accepting epithets and phrases consecrated to the use of natural description. A similar inability or indifference is seen even in the attempts to re-fashion Chaucer, or the Bible, or other old material, where the vigour and freshness and colour of the originals might have been expected to exercise a salutary influence. But to no purpose: all must be cast in the one mould, and clothed in the elegant diction of the time. Thus in Dryden's modernization of the "Canterbury Tales" the beautiful simplicity of Chaucer's descriptions of the sights and sounds of nature vanishes when garbed in the rapid and

[1] "The Progress of Taste," III, ll. 7-10.

conventional phrases and locutions of the classicists. Chaucer's " briddes " becomes " the painted birds," a " goldfinch " is amplified into a " goldfinch with gaudy pride of painted plumes," whilst a plain and simple mention of sunrise, " at the sun upriste," has to be paraphrased into

> Aurora had but newly chased the night
> And purpled o'er the sky with blushing light.

The old ballads and the Psalms suffered severely in the same way.[1]

The fact that the words most frequently used in this stock poetic diction have usually some sort of connexion with dress or ornament has not escaped notice, and it has its own significance. It is, as it were, a reflex of the fact that the nature poetry of the period is in large measure the work of writers to whom social life is the central fact of existence, for whom meadow, and woodland, and running water, mountain and sea, the silent hills, and the starry sky brought no inspiration, or at least no inspiration powerful enough to lead them to break through the shackles of conventionality imposed upon them by the taste of their age. Words like " paint " and " painted," " gaudy," " adorn," " deck," " gilds " and " gilded," " damasked," " enamelled," " embroidered," and dozens similar form the stock vocabulary of natural description; apart from the best of Akenside, and the works of one or two writers such as John Cunningham, it can safely be said that but few new descriptive terms were added to the " nature vocabulary " of English poetry during this period. How far English poetry is yet distant from a recognition of the sea as a source of poetic

[1] Wordsworth himself of course stigmatized the " hubbub of words " which was often the only result of these eighteenth century attempts to paraphrase passages from the Old and the New Testament " as they exist in our common translation."—*Vide* Prefaces, etc., " Poetical Works," ed. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1916), p. 943.

inspiration may be perhaps seen from the fact that its most frequent epithet is the feeble term "watery," whilst the magic of the sky by night or day evokes no image other than one that can be expressed by changes rung on such words as "azure," "concave," "serene," "ætherial." Even in "Night Thoughts," where the subject might have led to something new and fresh in the way of a "star-vocabulary," the best that Young can do is to take refuge in such periphrases as "tuneful spheres," "nocturnal sparks," "lucid orbs," "ethereal armies," "mathematic glories," "radiant choirs," "midnight counsellors," etc.

And the same lack of direct observation and individual expression is obvious whenever the classicists have to mention birds or animals. Wild life had to wait for White of Selborne, and for Blake and Burns and Cowper and Wordsworth, to be observed with accuracy and treated with sympathy; and it has been well remarked that if we are to judge from their verse, most of the poets of the first quarter of the eighteenth century knew no bird except the goldfinch or nightingale, and even these probably only by hearsay. For the same generalized diction is usually called upon, and birds are merely a "feathered" "tuneful," "plumy" or "warbling" choir, whilst a periphrasis, allowing of numerous and varied labels for the same animal, is felt to be the correct thing. In Dryden sheep are "the woolly breed" or "the woolly race"; bees are the "industrious kind" or "the frugal kind"; pigs are "the bristly care" or "the tusky kind"; frogs are "the loquacious race"; crows, "the craven kind," and so on: "the guiding principle seems to be that nothing must be mentioned by its own name." [1]

[1] For a detailed description of the stock diction of English "Classical" poetry, see especially Myra Reynolds, "Nature in English Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth" (Chicago, 1912), to which the foregoing remarks are indebted.

Many of these stock epithets owed their appearance of course to the requirements imposed upon poets by their adherence to the heroic couplet. Pope himself calls attention to the fact that the necessities of rhyme led to the unceasing repetition of stereotyped phrases and locutions:

> Where'er you find the "cooling western breeze."
> In the next line it "whispers through the trees";
> If crystal streams "with pleasing murmur creep"
> The reader's threaten'd, not in vain, with "sleep"—

adducing, with unconscious irony, the very rhymes prevalent in much of his own practice.[1]

It was also recognized by the versifiers that the indispensable polish and "correctness" of the decasyllabic line could only be secured by a mechanical use of epithets in certain positions. "There is a vast beauty [to me]," wrote Shenstone, "in using a word of a particular nature in the 8th and 9th syllable of an English verse. I mean what is virtually a dactyl. For instance,

> And pykes, the tyrants of the wat'ry plains.

Let any person of any ear substitute *liquid* for *wat'ry* and he will find the disadvantage."[2] Saintsbury has pointed out[3] that the "drastic but dangerous device of securing the undulating penetration of the line by the use of the *gradus* epithet was one of the chief causes of the intensely artificial character of the versification and its attendant diction. . . . There are passages in the 'Dispensary' and 'The Rape of the Lock,' where you can convert the decasyllable into the octosyllable for several lines together without

[1] "Essay on Criticism," I, l. 350 foll.
[2] "Essay on Men and Manners" (Works, 1764), Vol. II.
[3] "History of English Prosody" (1908), Vol. II, p. 449.

detriment to sense or poetry by simply taking out these specious superfluities."

In the year of Dryden's death (or perhaps in the following year) there had appeared the "Art of Poetry" by Edward Bysshe, whose metrical laws were generally accepted, as authoritative, during the eighteenth century. During the forty years of Dryden's literary career the supremacy of the stopped regular decasyllabic couplet had gradually established itself as the perfect form of verse. But Bysshe was the first prosodist to formulate the "rules" of the couplet, and in doing so he succeeded, probably because his views reflected the general prosodic tendencies of the time, in "codifying and mummifying" a system which soon became erected into a creed. "The foregoing rules (*of accent on the even places and pause mainly at the 4th, 5th, or 6th syllable*) ought indispensably to be followed in all our verses of 10 syllables: and the observation of them will produce Harmony, the neglect of them harshness and discord." [1] Into this rigid mechanical mould contemporary and succeeding versifiers felt themselves constrained to place their couplets. But to pad out their lines they were nearly always beset with a temptation to use the trochaic epithets, of which numerous examples have been given above. As a natural result such epithets soon became part and parcel of the poetic stock of language, and hence most of them were freely used by poets, not because of any intrinsic poetic value, but because they were necessary to comply with the absurd mechanics of their vehicle of expression.

Since the "Lives of the Poets" it has been customary to regard this "poetic diction" as the peculiar invention of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

[1] Bysshe, "Art of Poetry," Third Edition (1708), Chap. I, par. 1 (quoted by Saintsbury, "Loci Critici," 1903, p. 174).

century, and especially of Dryden and Pope, a belief largely due to Johnson's eulogies of these poets. As an ardent admirer of the school of Dryden and Pope, it was only natural that Johnson should express an exalted opinion of their influence on the poetic practice of his contemporaries. But others—Gray amongst them—did not view their innovations with much complacency, and towards the end of the century Cowper was already foreshadowing the attack to be made by Wordsworth and Coleridge in the next generation. To Pope's influence, he says in effect, after paying his predecessor a more or less formal compliment, was due the stereotyped form both of the couplet and of much of the language in which it was clothed. Pope had made

> poetry a mere mechanic art
> And every warbler had his tune by heart;

and in one of his letters he stigmatizes and pillories the inflated and stilted phraseology of Pope, and especially his translation of Homer.[1] Finally, Wordsworth and Coleridge agreed in ascribing the "poetical diction," against which their manifestoes were directed, to that source.

It is to be admitted that Pope's translation is to some extent open to the charge brought against it of corrupting the language with a meretricious standard of poetic diction. In his Preface he expresses his misgivings as to the language fit and proper for an English rendering of Homer, and indeed it is usually recognized that his diction was, to a certain extent, imposed upon him both by the nature of his original, as well as by the lack of elasticity in his closed couplet. To the latter cause was doubtless due, not only the use of stock epithets to fill out the line, but also the inevitable

[1] To the Rev. John Newton, December 10, 1785 (Wright, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 404–406).

repetition of certain words, due to the requirements of rhyme, even at the expense of straining or distorting their ordinary meaning. Thus *train*, for instance, on account of its convenience as a rhyming word, is often used to signify "a host," or "body," and similarly *plain, main*, for the ocean. In this connexion it has also been aptly pointed out that some of the defects resulted from the fact that Pope had founded his own epic style on that of the Latin poets, whose manner is most opposed to Homer's. Thus he often sought to deck out or expand simple thoughts or commonplace situations by using what he no doubt considered really "poetical language," and thus, for instance, where Homer simply says, "And the people perished," Pope has to say, "And heaped the camp with mountains of the dead." The repeated use of periphrases: *feathered fates*, for "arrows"; *fleecy breed* for "sheep"; *the wandering nation of a summer's day* for "insects"; *the beauteous kind* for "women"; *the shining mischief* for "a fascinating woman"; *rural care* for "the occupations of the shepherd"; *the social shades* for "the ghosts of two brothers," may be traced to the same influence.[1]

But apart from these defects the criticisms of Coleridge and Wordsworth, and their ascribing of the "poetical diction," which they wished to abolish, to the influence of Pope's "Homer," are to a large extent unjust. Many of the characteristics of this "spurious poetic language" were well established long before Pope produced his translation. It is probable that they are present to a much larger extent, for instance, in Dryden; *painted, rural, finny, briny, shady, vocal, mossy, fleecy*, come everywhere in his translations, and not only there. Some of his adjectives in *y* are more audacious than those of Pope: *spongy clouds*,

[1] *Vide* Pope's Works, ed. Courthope and Elwin (1889), Vol. V., p. 166.

chinky hives, snary webs, roomy sea, etc. Most of the periphrases used by Pope and many more are already to be found in Dryden: "summer" is *the sylvan reign;* "bees," *the frugal* or *industrious kind;* "arrows," *the feathered wood* or *feathered fates;* "sheep," *the woolly breed;* "frogs," *the loquacious race!* From all Pope's immediate predecessors and contemporaries similar examples may be quoted, like Gay's

> When floating clouds their spongy fleeces drain
> ("Rural Sports")

or Ambrose Philips:

> Hark: how they warble in the brambly bush
> The gaudy goldfinch or the speckly thrush
> ("Fourth Pastoral")

and that "Epistle to a Friend," in which he ridicules the very jargon so much used in his own Pastorals.[1]

Pope then may justly be judged "not guilty," at least "in the first degree," of having originated the poetic diction which Johnson praised and Wordsworth condemned; in using it, he was simply using the stock language for descriptive poetry, whether original or in translations, which had slowly come into being during the last decade of the seventeenth century. If it be traced to its origins, it will be found that most of it originated with that poet who may fairly be called the founder of the English "classical" school

[1] Philips has large supplies of the poetical stock-in-trade. He speaks of "honeysuckles of a *purple* dye," and anticipates Gray in his couplet,

> Like woodland Flowers which paint the desert glades
> And waste their sweets in unfrequented shades.
> ("The Fable of Thule")

(*Vide* "Poets of Great Britain," 1794, Vol. IX, 384–407.)

of poetry—to Milton, to whom in large measure is due, not merely the invention, but also, by the very potency of the influence exercised by his great works, its vogue in the eighteenth century.

Before the time of Milton, it is not too much to say, even when we remember the practice of Spenser and Donne and their followers, that there was no special language for poetry, little or nothing of the diction consecrated solely to the purposes of poets. The poets of the Elizabethan age and their immediate successors had access to all diction, upon which they freely drew. But it seems natural, indeed inevitable, that for Milton, resolved to sing of things "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," the ordinary language of contemporary prose or poetry should be found lacking. He was thus impelled, we may say, consciously and deliberately to form for himself a special poetical vocabulary, which, in his case, was abundantly justified, because it was so essentially fitted to his purpose, and bore the stamp of his lofty poetic genius.

This poetical vocabulary was made up of diverse elements. Besides the numerous "classical" words, which brought with them all the added charm of literary reminiscence, there were archaisms, and words of Latin origin, as well as words deliberately coined on Latin and Greek roots. But it included also most of the epithets of which the eighteenth century versifiers were so fond. Examples may be taken from any of the descriptive portions of the "Paradise Lost":

> On the soft downy bank damasked with flowers
> (IV, 334)

or

> About me round I saw
> Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
> And liquid lapse of murmuring streams.
> (VIII, 260–263)

Other phrases, like "vernal bloom," "lucid stream," "starry sphere," "flowery vale," "umbrageous grots," were to become the worn-out penny-pieces of the eighteenth century poetical mint. Milton indeed seems to have been one of the great inventors of adjectives ending in *y*, though in this respect he had been anticipated by Browne and others, and especially by Chapman, who has large numbers of them, and whose predilection for this method of making adjectives out of nouns amounts almost to an obsession.[1]

Milton was also perhaps the great innovator with another kind of epithet, which called forth the censure of Johnson, who described it as "the practice of giving to adjectives derived from substantives the terminations of participles," though the great dictator is here attacking a perfectly legitimate device freely used by the Jacobeans and by most of the poets since their time.[2] Nor are there wanting in Milton's epic instances of the idle periphrases banned by Wordsworth: *straw-built citadel* for "bee-hive," *vernal bloom* for "spring flowers," *smutty grain* for "gunpowder," *humid train* for the flowery waters of a river, etc.[3]

With Milton, then, may be said to have originated the "poetic diction," which drew forth Wordsworth's strictures, and which in the sequel proved a dangerous model for the swarm of versifiers who essayed to borrow or imitate it for the purpose of their dull and

[1] But, as de Selincourt points out in "Poems of John Keats" (1905, Appendix C, p. 580), it is only the excessive and unnatural use of these adjectives that calls for censure.

[2] Especially in the case of compound epithets. Cf. Earle, "Philology of the English Tongue," p. 601, for examples from the works of the poets from Shakespeare to Tennyson. For Shakespeare's use of this form, see Schmidt, "Shakespeare Lexicon," Vol. II, pp. 147 foll. (2nd Ed., London and Berlin, 1886).

[3] But compare "Milton," by Walter Raleigh (p. 249), where it is justly pointed out that not a few of these circuitous phrases are justified by "considerations of dramatic propriety."

commonplace themes. How much the Miltonic language, as aped and imitated by the "landscape gardeners and travelling pedlars" of the eighteenth century, lost in originality and freshness, may be felt, rather than described, if we compare so well-known a passage as the following with any of the quotations given earlier:

> Yet not the more
> Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
> Clear Spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,
> Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
> Thee, Sion, and the flowery brooks beneath,
> That wash thy hallowed feet and warbling flow.
> (P.L. III, 26–30)

But the minor poets of the eighteenth century, who, by their mechanical imitations, succeeded in reducing Milton's diction to the level of an almost meaningless jargon, had had every encouragement from their greater predecessors and contemporaries. The process of depreciation may be seen already in Dryden, and it is probably by way of Pope that much of the Miltonic language became part of the eighteenth century poetic stock-in-trade. Pope was a frequent borrower from Milton, and, in his "Homer" especially, very many reminiscences are to be found, often used in an artificial, and sometimes in an absurd, manner.[1] Moreover, Pope's free and cheapened use of many of Milton's descriptive epithets did much to reduce them to the rank of merely conventional terms, and in this respect the attack of Wordsworth and Coleridge was not without justice. But on the whole the proper conclusion would seem to be that what is usually labelled as "the *Pope* style" could with more justice and aptness be described as "the pseudo-Miltonic style." It is true that the versifiers freely pilfered the "Homer," and the vogue of much of the stock diction is thus

[1] Cf. Raleigh, "Milton," *op. cit.*, pp. 252–3.

due to that source, but so far as Pope himself is concerned there is justice in his plea that he left this style behind him when he emerged from " Fancy's maze " and " moralized his song."

To what extent this catalogue of lifeless words and phrases had established itself as the poetical thesaurus is to be seen in the persistency with which it maintained its position until the very end of the century, when Erasmus Darwin with a fatal certainty evolved from it all its worst features, and thus did much unconsciously to crush it out of existence. James Thomson is rightly regarded as one of the most important figures in the early history of the Romantic Revolt, and he has had merited praise for his attempts to provide himself with a new language of his own. In this respect, however, he had been anticipated by John Philips, whose " Splendid Shilling " appeared in 1705, followed by " Cyder " a year later. Philips, though not the first Miltonic imitator, was practically the first to introduce the Miltonic diction and phrases, whilst at the same time he acquired the knack of adding phrases of his own to the common stock. He was thus an innovator from whom Thomson himself learned not a little.

But though the " Seasons " is ample testimony to a new and growing alertness to natural scenery, Thomson found it hard to escape from the fetters of the current poetic language. We feel that he is at least trying to write with his eye steadily fixed upon the object, but he could perhaps hardly be expected to get things right from the very beginning. Thus a stanza from his " Pastoral Entertainment " is purely conventional :

> The place appointed was a spacious vale
> Fanned always by a cooling western gale
> Which in soft breezes through the meadow stray
> And steal the ripened fragrances away—

while he paraphrases a portion of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew into :

> Observe the rising lily's snowy grace,
> Observe the various vegetable race,
> They neither toil nor spin, but careless grow
> Yet see how warm they blush, how bright they glow,

where the stock terms scarcely harmonize with the simple Biblical diction. He was well aware of the attendant dangers and difficulties, and in the first book of " The Seasons " he gives expression to the need he feels of a language fit to render adequately all that he sees in Nature.[1] But though there is much that is fresh and vivid in his descriptive diction, and much that reveals him as a bold pioneer in poetic outlook and treatment, the tastes and tendencies of his age were too strong entirely to be escaped. Birds are the *plumy*, or *feathered people*, or *the glossy kind*,[2] and a flight of swallows is *a feathered eddy ;* sheep are *the bleating kind*, etc. In one passage (" Spring," ll. 114–135) he deals at length with the insects that attack the crops without once mentioning them by name : they are *the feeble race, the frosty tribe, the latent foe*, and even *the sacred sons of vengeance.* He has in general the traditional phraseology for the mountains and the sea, though a few of his epithets for the mountains, as *keen-air'd* and *forest-rustling*, are new. He speaks of the Alps as *dreadful, horrid, vast, sublime. Shaggy* and *nodding* are also applied to mountains as well as to rocks and forests ; winter is usually described in the usual classical manner as *deformed* and *inverted.* Leaves are the *honours* of trees, paths are *erroneous*,

[1] " Spring," ll. 478 foll.

[2] In " Summer," Thomson had first used *feathery race* which was later amended into *tuneful race*—apparently the best improvement he could think of !

caverns *sweat*, etc., and he also makes large use of Latinisms.[1]

John Dyer (1700–1758), though now and then conventional in his diction, has a good deal to his credit, and is a worthy contemporary of the author of "The Seasons." Thus in the "Country Walk" it is the old stock diction he gives us:

> Look upon that *flowery plain*
> How the sheep surround their *swain*;
> And there behold a *bloomy mead*,
> A silver stream, a willow shade;

and much the same thing is to be found in "The Fleece," published in 1757:

> The crystal dews, impearl'd upon the grass,
> Are touched by Phœbus' beams and mount aloft,
> With various clouds to paint the azure sky;

whilst he has almost as many adjectives in *y* as Ambrose Philips. But these are more than redeemed by the new descriptive touches which appear, sometimes curiously combined with the stereotyped phrases, as in "The Fleece" (Bk. III):

> The scatter'd mists reveal the dusky hills;
> Grey dawn appears; the golden morn ascends,
> And paints the glittering rocks and purple woods.

Nor must we forget "Grongar Hill," which has justly received high praise for its beauties and felicities of description.

It is scarcely necessary to illustrate further the vogue of this sort of diction in the first half of the eighteenth century; it is to be found everywhere in the poetry of the period, and the conventional epithets and phrases

[1] For a detailed study of Thomson's diction, see especially Leon Morel, "James Thomson. Sa Vie et Ses Œuvres" (Paris, 1895), Chap. IV, pp. 412 foll.

quoted from Dyer and Thomson may be taken as typical of the majority of their contemporaries. But this lifeless, stereotyped language has also invaded the work of some of the best poets of the century, including not only the later classicists, but also those who have been "born free," and are foremost among the Romantic rebels. The poetic language of William Collins shows a strange mixture of the old style and the new. That it was new and individual is well seen from Johnson's condemnation, for Johnson recognized very clearly that the language of the "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands" did not conform to what was probably his own view that the only language fit and proper for poetry was such as might bear comparison with the polish and elegance of Pope's "Homer." It is not difficult to make due allowance for Johnson when he speaks of Collins's diction as "harsh, unskilfully laboured, and injudicially selected"; we deplore the classical bias, and are content enough to recognize and enjoy for ourselves the matchless beauty and charm of Collins's diction at its best. Yet much of the language of his earlier work betrays him as more or less a poetaster of the eighteenth century. The early "Oriental Eclogues" abound in the usual descriptive details, just as if the poet had picked out his words and phrases from the approved lists. Thus,

> Yet midst the blaze of courts she fixed her love
> On the cool fountain or the shady grove
> Still, with the shepherd's innocence her mind
> To the sweet vale and flowery mead inclined;

and even in the "Ode on the Popular Superstitions" there were expressions like *watery surge*, *sheeny gold*, though now and then the "new" diction is strikingly exemplified in a magnificent phrase such as *gleamy pageant*.

When Collins has nothing new to say his poetic language is that of his time, but when his inspiration is at its loftiest his diction is always equal to the task, and it is then that he gives us the unrivalled felicities of "The Ode to Evening."

Amongst all the English poets there has probably never been one, even when we think of Tennyson, more careful and meticulous (or "curiously elaborate," as Wordsworth styled it) about the diction of his verses, the very words themselves, than Gray. This fact, and not Matthew Arnold's opinion that it was because Gray had fallen on an "age of prose," may perhaps be regarded as sufficient to explain the comparative scantiness of his literary production. He himself, in a famous letter, has clearly stated his ideal of literary expression: "Extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical, is one of the grand beauties of lyrical poetry."[1] Hence all his verses bear evidence of the most painstaking labour and rigorous self-criticism, almost as if every word had been weighed and assessed before being allowed to appear. His correspondence with Mason and Beattie, referred to in the previous chapter, shows the same fastidiousness with regard to the work of others. Gray indeed, drawing freely upon Milton and Dryden, created for himself a special poetic language which in its way can become almost as much an abuse as the otiosities of many of his predecessors and contemporaries—the "cumbrous splendour" of which Johnson complained. Yet he is never entirely free from the influence of the "classical" diction which, for Johnson, represented the ideal. His earliest work is almost entirely conventional in its descriptions, the prevailing tone being exemplified in such phrases as *the purple year, the Attic Warbler pours her throat*

[1] To Mason, January 13, 1758 ("Letters of Gray," ed. Tovey, Vol. II, pp. 13-14).

(Ode on "The Spring"), whilst in the "Progress of Poesy," lines like

> Through verdant vales and Ceres' golden reign

are not uncommon, though of course the possibility of the direct influence of the classics, bringing with it the added flavour of reminiscence, is not to be ignored in this sort of diction. Moreover, a couplet from the fragmentary "Alliance of Education and Government":

> Scent the new fragrance of *the breathing rose*
> And quaff *the pendent vintage* as it grows—

is almost typical, apart from the freshness of the epithet *breathing*, of what Wordsworth wished to abolish. Even the "Elegy" has not escaped the contagion: *storied urn or animated bust* is perilously akin to the pedantic periphrases of the Augustans.

Before passing to a consideration of the work of Johnson and Goldsmith, who best represent the later eighteenth century development of the "classical" school of Pope, reference may be made to two other writers. The first of these is Thomas Chatterton. In that phase of the early Romantic Movement which took the form of attempts to revive the past, Chatterton of course played an important part, and the pseudo-archaic language which he fabricated for the purpose of his "Rowley" poems is interesting, not only as an indication of the trend of the times towards the poetic use of old and obsolete words, but also as reflecting, it would seem, a genuine endeavour to escape from the fetters of the conventional and stereotyped diction of his day. On the other hand, in his avowedly original work, Chatterton's diction is almost entirely imitative. He has scarcely

a single fresh image or description; his series of "Elegies" and "Epistles" are clothed in the current poetic language. He uses the stock expressions, *purling streams, watery bed, verdant vesture of the smiling fields,* along with the usual periphrases, such as *the muddy nation* or *the speckled folk* for "frogs." One verse of an "Elegy" written in 1768 contains in itself nearly all the conventional images:

> Ye variegated children of the Spring,
> Ye blossoms blushing with the pearly dew;
> Ye birds that sweetly in the hawthorn sing;
> Ye flowery meads, lawns of verdant hue.

It can be judged from these examples how a stereotyped mode of expression may depreciate to a large extent the value of much of the work of a poet of real genius. Chatterton is content in most of his avowedly "original" work to turn his poetic thoughts into the accepted moulds, which is all the more surprising when we remember his laborious methods of manufacturing an archaic diction for his mediaeval "discoveries,"[1] even if we may assume that it reflected a strong desire for something fresh and new.

A poet of much less genius, but one who enjoyed great contemporary fame, was William Falconer, whose "Shipwreck," published in 1762, was the most popular sea-poem of the eighteenth century. The most striking characteristic of the descriptive parts of the poem is the daring and novel use of technical sea-terms, but apart from this the language is purely conventional. The sea is still the same *desert-waste, faithless deep, watery way, world, plain, path,* or *the fluid plain, the glassy plain,* whilst the landscape

[1] *Vide* "The Poems of Chatterton, with an Essay on the Rowley Poems," by W. W. Skeat (1871).

catalogue is as lifeless as any of the descriptive passages of the early eighteenth century :

> on every spray
> The warbling birds exalt their evening lay,
> Blithe skipping o'er yon hill the fleecy train
> Join the deep chorus of the lowing plain.

When he leaves this second-hand description, and describes scenes actually experienced and strongly felt, Falconer's language is correspondingly fresh and vivid, the catastrophe of the shipwreck itself, for example, being painted with extraordinary power.[1]

When we come to Johnson and Goldsmith, here again a distinction must be made between the didactic or satiric portion of their work and that which is descriptive. Johnson's didactic verse, marked as it is by a free use of inversion and ellipsis, rarely attains the clearness and simplicity of Goldsmith's, whilst he has also much more of the stock descriptive terms and phrases. His " Odes " are almost entirely cast in this style. Thus in " Spring " :

> Now o'er the rural Kingdom roves
> Soft Pleasure with her laughing train,
> Love warbles in the vocal groves
> And vegetation plants the plains,

whilst exactly the same stuff is turned out for a love poem, " To Stella " :

> Not the soft sighs of vernal gales
> The fragrance of the flowery vales
> The murmurs of the crystal rill
> The vocal grove, the verdant hill.

Though there is not so much of this kind of otiose

[1] Canto III, 652 foll.

description in the poems of Goldsmith, yet Mr. Dobson's estimate of his language may be accepted as a just one: "In spite of their beauty and humanity," he says, "the lasting quality of 'The Traveller' and 'The Deserted Village' is seriously prejudiced by his half-way attitude between the poetry of convention and the poetry of nature—between the *gradus* epithet of Pope and the direct vocabulary of Wordsworth." [1] Thus when we read such lines as

> The slow canal, the yellow-blossomed vale,
> The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail
> ("Traveller," ll. 293–4)

we feel that Goldsmith too has been writing with his eye on the object, and even in such a line as

> The breezy covert of the warbling grove
> (*Ibid.*, 360)

there is a freshness of description that compensates for the use of the hackneyed *warbling grove*. On the other hand, there are in both pieces passages which it is difficult not to regard as purely conventional in their language. Thus in "The Traveller," the diction, if not entirely of the stock type, is not far from it:

> Ye glittering towns, with wealth and splendour crowned
> Ye fields, where summer spreads profusion round
> Ye lakes, whose vessels catch the busy gale
> Ye bending swains, that dress the flowery vale,

and so on for another dozen lines.[2]

Only the slightest traces, however, of this mechanical word-painting appear in "The Deserted Village,"

[1] "A Paladin of Philanthropy" (1899), p. 59 (quoted by Courthope, "History English Poetry," V, 216).

[2] But cf. Courthope, "History English Poetry" (1910), Vol. V, p. 218.

almost the only example of the stereotyped phrase being in the line

> These simple blessings of *the lowly train* (l. 252).

Thus whilst Goldsmith in much of his work continues the classical school of Pope, alike in his predilection for didactic verse and his practice of the heroic couplet, in his poetic language he is essentially individual. In his descriptive passages he rarely uses the conventional jargon, and the greater part of the didactic and moral observations of his two most famous poems is written in simple and unadorned language that would satisfy the requirements of the Wordsworthian canon.

That pure and unaffected diction could be employed with supreme effect in other than moral and didactic verse was soon to be shown in the lyric poetry of William Blake, who, about thirty years before Wordsworth launched his manifestoes, evolved for himself a poetic language, wonderful alike in its beauty and simplicity. In those of the " Songs of Innocence " and " The Songs of Experience," which are concerned with natural description, the epithets and expressions that had long been consecrated to this purpose find little or no place. Here and there we seem to catch echoes of the stock diction, as in the lines,

> the starry floor
> the watery shore

of the Introduction to the " Songs of Experience," or the

> happy, silent, *moony* beams

of " The Cradle Song " ; but in each case the expressions are redeemed and revitalized by the pure and joyous singing note of the lyrics of which they form part. Only once is Blake to be found using the con-

ventional epithet, when in his "Laughing Song" he writes

> the *painted* birds laugh in the shade,

whilst with his usual unerring instinct he marks down the monotonous smoothness of so much contemporary verse in that stanza of his ode "To the Muses" in which, as has been well said, the eighteenth century dies to music: [1]

> How have you left the ancient love
> That bards of old enjoyed in you!
> The languid strings do scarcely move,
> The sound is forced, the notes are few.

Not that he altogether escaped the blighting influence of his time. In the early "Imitation of Spenser," we get such a couplet as

> To sit in council with his modern peers
> And judge of tinkling rhimes and elegances terse,

whilst the "vicious diction" Wordsworth was to condemn is also to be seen in this line from one of the early "Songs":

> and Phœbus fir'd my vocal rage.

Even as late as 1800 Blake was capable of writing

> Receive this tribute from a harp sincere.[2]

But these slight blemishes only seem to show up in stronger light the essential beauty and nobility of his poetical style.

But the significance of Blake's work in the purging and purifying of poetic diction was not, as might perhaps be expected, recognized by his contemporaries

[1] Arthur Symons, "William Blake" (1907), p. 39.
[2] To Mrs. Butts: "Poetical Works," ed. Sampson (Oxford, 1914), p. 187.

and immediate successors. For Coleridge, writing some thirty years later, it was Cowper, and his less famous contemporary Bowles, who were the pioneers in the rejecting of the old and faded style and the beginning of the new, the first to combine "natural thoughts with natural diction." [1] Coleridge's opinion seems to us now to be an over-statement, but we rather suspect that Cowper was not unwilling to regard himself as an innovator in poetic language. In his correspondence he reveals himself constantly preoccupied with the question of poetic expression, and especially with the language fit and proper for his translation of Homer. His opinion of Pope's attempt has already been referred to, but he himself was well aware of the inherent difficulties.[2] He had, it would seem, definite and decided opinions on the subject of poetic language; he recognized the lifelessness of the accepted diction, which, rightly or wrongly, he attributed especially to the influence of Pope's "Homer," and tried to escape from its bondage. His oft-quoted thesis that in the hands of the eighteenth century poets poetry had become a "mere mechanic art," he developed at length in his ode "Secundum Artem," which comprises almost a complete catalogue of the ornaments which enabled the warblers to have their tune by heart. What Cowper in that ode pillories—"the trim epithets," the "sweet alternate rhyme," the "flowers of light description"—were in the main what were to be held up to ridicule in the *Lyrical Ballads* prefaces; Wordsworth's attack is here anticipated by twenty years.

But, as later in the case of Wordsworth, Cowper in

[1] "Biographia Literaria," ed. Shawcross, p. 16. (Oxford, 1907.)

[2] Cf. "Letters," to Samuel Rose, December 13, 1787: "Correspondence" arranged by W. Wright (1904), Vol. III, p. 190. To C. Rowley, February 21, 1788, *ibid.*, pp. 231 foll.

his early work has not a little of the language which he is at such pains to condemn. Thus Horace again appears in the old familiar guise,

> Now o'er the spangled hemisphere,
> Diffused the starry train appear
> (" Fifth Satire ")

whilst even in " Table Talk " we find occasional conventional descriptions such as

> Nature . . .
> Spreads the fresh verdure of the fields and leads
> The dancing Naiads through the dewy meads.

But there is little of this kind of description in " The Task." Now and then we meet with examples of the old periphrases, such as the *pert voracious kind* for " sparrows," or the description of kings as the *arbiters of this terraqueous swamp*, though many of these pseudo-Miltonic expressions are no doubt used for playful effect. In those parts of the poem which deal with the sights and sounds of outdoor life the images are new and fresh, whilst in the moral and didactic portions the language is, as a rule, uniformly simple and direct. But for the classical purity of poetical expression in which the poet is at times pre-eminent, it is perhaps best to turn to his shorter poems, such as " To Mary," or to the last two stanzas of " The Castaway," and especially to some of the " Olney Hymns," of the language of which it may be said that every word is rightly chosen and not one is superfluous. Indeed, it may well be that these hymns, together with those of Watts and Wesley,[1] which by their very purpose demanded a mode of expression severe in its simplicity, but upon which were stamped the refinement and correct taste of the scholars and

[1] E.g. Charles Wesley's " Wrestling Jacob," or Watts's " When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

gentlemen who wrote them—it may well be that the more natural mode of poetic diction which thus arose gave to Wordsworth a starting point when he began to expound and develop his theories concerning the language of poetry.[1]

Whilst Cowper was thus at once heralding, and to a not inconsiderable extent exemplifying, the Romantic reaction in form, another poet, George Crabbe, had by his realism given, even before Cowper, an important indication of one characteristic aspect of the new poetry.

But though the force and fidelity of his descriptions of the scenery of his native place, and the depth and sincerity of his pathos, give him a leading place among those who anticipated Wordsworth, other characteristics stamp him as belonging to the old order and not to the new. His language is still largely that perfected by Dryden and Pope, and worked to death by their degenerate followers. The recognized "elegancies" and "flowers of speech" still linger on. A peasant is still a *swain*, poets are *sons of verse*, fishes *the finny tribe*, country folk *the rural tribe*. The word *nymph* appears with a frequency that irritates the reader, and how ludicrous an effect it could produce by its sudden appearance in tales of the realistic type that Crabbe loved may be judged from such examples as

> It soon appeared that while this nymph divine
> Moved on, there met her rude uncivil kine.

Whilst he succeeds in depicting the life of the rustic poor, not as it appears in the rosy tints of Goldsmith's pictures, but in all its reality—sordid, gloomy and

[1] *Vide* Courthope, *op. cit.*, Book V, Ch. XI; and cp. the confident and just claims put forward by John Wesley himself on behalf of the language of the hymns, in his "Preface to the Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists," 1780.

stern, as it for the most part is—the old stereotyped descriptions are to be found scattered throughout his grimly realistic pictures of the countryside. Thus when Crabbe writes of

> tepid meads
> And lawns irriguous and the blooming field
> ("Midnight")

or

> The lark on quavering pinion woo'd the day
> Less towering linnets fill'd the vocal spray
> ("The Candidate")

we feel that he has not had before his eyes the real scenes of his Suffolk home, but that he has been content to recall and imitate the descriptive stock-in-trade that had passed current for so many years; even the later "Tales," published up to the years when Shelley and Keats were beginning their activities, are not free from this defect.

About ten years before Wordsworth launched his manifestoes, there were published the two works of Erasmus Darwin, to which reference has already been made, and in which this stock language was unconsciously reduced to absurdity, not only because of the themes on which it was employed, but also because of the fatal ease and facility with which it was used. It is strange to think that but a few years before the famous sojourn of Coleridge and Wordsworth on the Quantocks, "The Loves of the Plants," and its fellow, should have won instant and lasting popularity.[1]

That Darwin took himself very seriously is to be seen from "The Interludes," in which he airs his views,[2] whilst in his two poems he gave full play to

[1] Cf. Coleridge "Biographia Literaria," ed. Shawcross, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[2] *Vide* especially the dialogue with a Bookseller on the language of poetry.

his "fancy" ("'theory' we cannot call it," comments De Quincey) that nothing was strictly poetic except what is presented in visual image. This in itself was not bad doctrine, as it at least implied that poetry should be concrete, and thus reflected a desire to escape from the abstract and highly generalized diction of his day. But Darwin so works his dogma to death that the reader is at first dazzled, and finally bewildered by the multitude of images presented, in couplets of monotonous smoothness, in innumerable passages, such as

> On twinkling fins my pearly nations play
> Or wind with sinuous train their trackless way:
> My plumy pairs in gay embroidery dressed
> Form with ingenious bill the pensile nest.
> ("Botanic Garden," I)

Still there is something to be said for the readers who enjoyed having the facts and theories of contemporary science presented to them in so coloured and fantastic a garb.

Nor must it be forgotten that the youthful Wordsworth was much influenced by these poems of Darwin, so that his early work shows many traces of the very pseudo-poetic language which he was soon to condemn. Thus in "An Evening Walk"[1] there are such stock phrases as "emerald meads," "watery plains," the "forest train."

In "Descriptive Sketches" examples are still more numerous. Thus:

> Soft bosoms breathe around contagious sighs
> And amorous music on the water dies,

which might have come direct from Pope, or

> Here all the seasons revel hand-in-hand
> 'Mid lawns and shades by breezy rivulets fanned.

[1] In both the first and the final forms "Poetical Works," ed. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1916) Appendix, pp. 592 foll.

The old epithet *purple* is frequently found (*purple* lights and vernal plains, the *purple* morning, the fragrant mountain's *purple* side), and there are a few awkward adjectives in *y* ("the *piny* waste"), whilst a gun is described as the *thundering tube.*

Few poems indeed are to be found in the eighteenth century with so many fantastic conceits as these 1793 poems of Wordsworth. Probably, as has been suggested, the poet was influenced to an extent greater than he himself imagined by "The Botanic Garden," so that the poetical devices freely employed in his early work may be the result of a determination to conform to the "theory" of poetry which Darwin in his precept and practice had exemplified. Later, the devices which had satisfied him in his first youthful productions must have appeared to him as more or less vicious, and altogether undesirable, and in disgust he resolved to exclude at one stroke all that he was pleased to call "poetic diction." But, little given to self-criticism, when he penned his memorable Prefaces, he fixed the responsibility for "the extravagant and absurd diction" upon the whole body of his predecessors, unable or unwilling to recognize that he himself had begun his poetic career with a free use of many of its worst faults.[1]

Of the stock diction of eighteenth century poetry we may say, then, that in the first place it is in large measure a reflection of the normal characteristic attitude of the poets of the "neo-classical" period towards Nature and all that the term implies. The "neo-classical" poets were but little interested in Nature; the countryside made no great appeal to them, and it was the Town and its teeming life that focused their interest and attention. Man, and his life as a social being, was their "proper study";

[1] For a detailed account see E. Legouis, "La Jeunesse de Wordsworth" (English translation, 1897; Revised edition, 1921).

and this concentration of interest finds its reflection in the new and vivid language of the "essays," satires, and epistles, whilst in the "nature poetry" the absence of genuine feeling is only too often betrayed by the dead epithets of the stock diction each poet felt himself at liberty to draw upon according to his needs. It is scarcely necessary to remind ourselves that it is in Pope's "Pastorals" and the "Homer," not in the "Dunciad" or "The Essay on Man," that the stock words, phrases, and similes are to be found, and the remark is equally true of most of the poets of his period. But Pope has been unjustly pilloried, for the stock diction did not originate with him. It is true that the most masterly and finished examples of what is usually styled "the eighteenth century poetic diction" are to be found in his work generally, and no doubt the splendour of his translation of Homer did much to establish a vogue for many of the set words and phrases. At the same time the supremacy of the heroic couplet which he did so much to establish played its part in perpetuating the stock diction, the epithets of which were often technically just what was required to give the decasyllabic verse the desired "correctness" and "smoothness." But it is unjust to saddle him with the responsibility for the lack of originality evident in many of his successors and imitators.

The fact that this stock language is not confined to the neo-classical poets proper, but is found to a large extent persisting to the very end of the eighteenth century, and even invading the early work of the writer who led the revolt against it, is indicative of another general cause of its widespread prevalence. Briefly, it may be said that not only did the conventional poetic diction reflect in the main the average neo-classical outlook on external nature; it reflected also the average eighteenth century view as to the

nature of poetical language, which regarded its words and phrases as satisfying the artistic canon, not in virtue of the degree in which they reflected the individual thought or emotion of the poet, but according as they conformed to a standard of language based on accepted models.

CHAPTER IV

LATINISM IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

THERE is now to be noticed another type of eighteenth century poetic diction which was in its way as prevalent, and, it may be added, as vicious, as the stock diction which has been discussed in the previous chapter. This was the use of a latinized vocabulary, from the early years of the century down to the days when the work of Goldsmith, Cowper, and Crabbe seemed to indicate a sort of interregnum between the old order and the new.

This fashion, or craze, for "latinity" was not of course a sudden and special development which came in with the eighteenth century: it was rather the culmination of a tendency which was not altogether unconnected with the historic development of the language itself. As a factor in literary composition, it had first begun to be discussed when the Elizabethan critics and men of letters were busying themselves with the special problem of diction. Latinism was one of the excesses to which poets and critics alike directed their attention, and their strictures and warnings were such as were inevitable and salutary in the then transitional confusion of the language.[1] In the early years of the seventeenth century this device for strengthening and ornamenting the language was adopted more or less deliberately by such poets

[1] *Vide* "Elizabethan Critical Essays," ed. Smith, Vol. I, Intro., pp. lv foll.

as Phineas and Giles Fletcher, especially the latter, who makes free use of such coinages as *elamping*, *appetence*, *elonging*, etc.[1]

The example of the Fletchers in thus adding to their means of literary expression was soon to be followed by a greater poet. When Milton came to write his epics, it is evident, as has been said, that he felt the need for a diction in keeping with the exalted theme he had chosen, and his own taste and temperament, as well as the general tendencies of his age, naturally led him to make use of numerous words of direct or indirect "classical" origin. But his direct coinages from Latin and Greek are much less than has often been supposed.[2] What he seems to have done in many cases was to take words the majority of which had been recently formed, usually for scientific or philosophic purposes, and incorporate them in his poetical vocabulary. Thus *Atheous*, *attrite*, *conflagrant*, *jaculation*, *myrrhine*, *paranymph*, *plenipotent*, etc., are instances of classical formations which in most cases seem, according to "The New English Dictionary," to have made their first literary appearance shortly before the Restoration. In other instances Milton's latinisms are much older.[3] What is important is the fact that Milton was able to infuse these and many similar words with a real poetic power, and we may be sure that the use of such words as *ethereal*, *adamantine*, *refulgent*, *regal*, whose very essence, as has been remarked, is suggestiveness, rather than close defini-

[1] Both the Fletchers also used many other latinized forms found before their time, and which in some cases they probably took direct from Spenser.

[2] E.g. by Courthope, "History of English Poetry" (1910), Vol. III, p. 339, where a list is given ("only a few of the examples") of Milton's "coinages" and "creations." Of this list only some half dozen (according to the N.E.D.) owe their first literary appearance to Milton.

[3] E.g. *debel*, *disglorified*, *conglobe*, *illaudable*, etc., date from the sixteenth century; *Battailous* goes back to Wycliff (N.E.D.).

tion, was altogether deliberate.[1] In addition to this use of a latinized vocabulary, there is a continuous latinism of construction, which is to be found in the early poems, but which, as might be expected, is most prominent in the great epics, where idioms like *after his charge received* (*P.L.*, V 248), *since first her salutation heard* (*P.R.*, II, 107) are frequent.[2]

Milton, we may say, of purpose prepense made or culled for himself a special poetical vocabulary which was bound to suffer severely at the hands of incompetent and uninspired imitators. But though the widespread use of latinized diction is no doubt largely to be traced to the influence of Milton at a time when "English verse went Milton mad," it may perhaps also be regarded as a practice that reflected to a certain extent the general literary tendencies of the Augustan age.

When Milton was writing his great epics Dryden was just beginning his literary career, but though there are numerous examples of latinisms in the works of the latter, they are not such as would suggest that he had been influenced to any extent by the Miltonic manner of creating a poetical vocabulary. There is little or no coinage of the "magnificent" words which Milton used so freely, though latinized forms like *geniture*, *irremeable*, *praescious*, *tralineate*, are frequent. Dryden, however, as might be expected, often uses words in their original etymological sense. Thus besides the common use of *prevent*, *secure*, etc., we find in the translation of the "Metamorphoses":

> He had either *led*
> Thy mother then,

where *led* is used in the sense of Latin *ducere* (marry)

[1] Cf. "Milton," by Walter Raleigh (1915), pp. 247 foll.

[2] *Vide* Masson, "Milton's Poetical Works," Vol. III, pp. 77–78 (1890–).

and "*refers* the limbs," where "refers" means "restores."[1] Examples are few in Dryden's original works, but "Annus Mirabilis" furnishes instances like the *ponderous ball expires*, where "expires" means "is blown forth," and "each wonted room *require*" ("seek again"), whilst there is an occasional reminiscence of such Latin phrases as "manifest of crimes" for *manifestus sceleris* ("Ab. and Achit.").

What has been said of the latinisms of Dryden applies also to those of Pope. Words like *prevent, erring, succeed, devious, horrid, missive, vagrant*, are used with their original signification, and there are passages like

> For this he bids the *nervous* artists vie.

Imitations of Latin constructions are occasionally found:

> Some god has told them, or themselves survey
> *The bark escaped.*

Phrases like "*fulgid* weapons," "roseate *unguents*," "*circumfusile* gold," "*frustrate* triumphs," etc., are probably coinages imposed by the necessities of translation. Other similar phrases, such as (tears) *conglobing* on the dust," "with *unctuous* fir *foment* the flame," seem to anticipate something of the absurdity into which this kind of diction was later to fall.[2]

On the whole, the latinisms found in the works of Dryden and Pope are not usually deliberate creations for the purpose of poetic ornament. They are such as would probably seem perfectly natural in the

[1] Similarly the "Virgil" translation has, e.g., *in a round error* for "wandering round and round," etc.

[2] That it could easily become absurd was not unperceived in the eighteenth century. *Vide* Leonard Welsted: "Epistle to Mr. Pope," May, 1730 ("Works in Verse and Prose," London, 1787, p. 141).

seventeenth and early eighteenth century, when the traditions of classical study still persisted strongly, and when the language of prose itself was still receiving additions from that source. Moreover, the large amount of translation done by both poets from the classics was bound to result in the use of numerous classical terms and constructions.

In 1705 there appeared the "Splendid Shilling" of John Philips, followed by his "Cyder" and other poems a year later. These poems are among the first of the Miltonic parodies or imitations, and, being written in blank verse, they may be regarded as heralding the struggle against the tyranny of the heroic couplet. Indeed, blank verse came to be distinctly associated with the Romantic movement, probably because it was considered that its structure was more encouraging to the unfettered imagination than the closed couplets of the classicists. It is thus interesting to note that the reaction in form, which marks one distinct aspect of Romanticism, was really responsible for some of the excesses against which the manifestoes afterwards protested; for it is in these blank verse poems especially that there was developed a latinism both of diction and construction that frequently borders on the ludicrous, even when the poet's object was not deliberately humorous.

In "Blenheim" terms and phrases such as *globous iron, by chains connexed*, etc., are frequent, and the attempts at Miltonic effects is seen in numerous passages like

> Upborne
> By frothy billows thousands float the stream
> In cumbrous mail, with love of farther shore;
> Confiding in their hands, that sed'lous strive
> To cut th' outrageous fluent.

In "Cyder" latinisms are still more abundant: *the nocent brood* (of snails), *treacle's viscuous juice, with*

grain incentive stored, the defecated liquour, irriguous sleep, as well as passages like

> Nor from the sable ground expect success
> Nor from cretacious, stubborn or jejune,

or

> Bards with volant touch
> Traverse loquacious strings.

This kind of thing became extremely common and persisted throughout the eighteenth century.

Incidentally, it may here be remarked that the publication of Philips's poems probably gave to Lady Winchilsea a hint for her poem "Fanscombe Barn."[1] Philips, as has been noted, was one of the very first to attempt to use Milton's lofty diction, and his latinized sentence structure for commonplace and even trivial themes, and no doubt his experiment, having attracted Lady Winchilsea's attention, inspired her own efforts at Miltonic parody, though it is probably "Cyder" and "The Splendid Shilling," rather then "Paradise Lost," that she takes as her model. Thus the carousings of the tramps forgathered in Fanscombe Barn are described:

> the swarthy bowl appears,
> Replete with liquor, globulous to fight,
> And threat'ning inundation o'er the brim;

and the whole poem shows traces of its second-hand inspiration.

Even those who are now remembered chiefly as Spenserian imitators indulge freely in a latinized style when they take to blank verse. Thus William Thompson, who in his poem "Sickness" has many phrases like "the arm *ignipotent*," "*inundant* blaze" (Bk. I), "terrestrial stores medicinal" (Bk. III),

[1] *Vide* "Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea," ed. Myra Reynolds, pp. 210–213 (Chicago, 1903).

with numerous passages, of which the following is typical:

> the poet's mind
> (Effluence essential of heat and light)
> Now mounts a loftier wing when Fancy leads
> The glittering track, and points him to the sky
> Excursive. (Bk. IV)

William Shenstone, the author of one of the most successful of the Spenserian imitations, is more sparing in this respect, but even in his case passages such as

> Of words indeed profuse,
> Of gold tenacious, their torpescent soul
> Clenches their coin, and what electric fire
> Shall solve the frosty grip, and bid it flow?
> ("Economy," Part I)

are not infrequent.

But it is not only the mere versifiers who have succumbed to this temptation. By far the most important of the early blank verse poems was Thomson's "Seasons," which, first appearing from 1726–1730, was subsequently greatly revised and altered up to the edition of 1746, the last to be issued in the author's lifetime.[1] The importance and success of "The Seasons" as one of the earliest indications of the "Return to Nature" has received adequate recognition, but Thomson was an innovator in the style, as well as in the matter, of his poem. As Dr. Johnson remarked, he saw things always with the eyes of a poet, and the quickened and revived interest in external nature which he reflects inevitably impelled him to search for a new diction to give it expression. We can see him, as it were, at work trying to replace the current coinage with a new mintage of his own, or rather with a mixed currency, derived partly from Milton, and partly from his own resources. His

[1] *Vide* "Complete Poetical Works," edited J. L. Robertson (Oxford, 1908), which includes a variorum edition of "The Seasons."

diction is thus in some degrees as artificial as the stock diction of his period, especially when his attempts to emulate or imitate the magnificence of Milton betray him into pomposity or even absurdity; but his poetical language as a whole is leavened with so much that is new and his very own as to make it clear that the Romantic revival in the style, as well as in the contents, of poetry has really begun. The resulting peculiarities of style did not escape notice in his own time. He was recognized as the creator of a new poetical language, and was severely criticized even by some of his friends. Thus Somerville urged with unusual frankness a close revision of the style of "The Seasons":

> Read Philips much, consider Milton more
> But from their dross extract the purer ore:
> To coin new words or to restore the old
> In southern lands is dangerous and bold;
> But rarely, very rarely, will succeed
> When minted on the other side of Tweed.[1]

Thomson's comment on this criticism was emphatic: "Should I alter my ways I should write poorly. I must choose what appears to be the most significant epithet or I cannot proceed."[2] Hence, though lines and whole passages of "The Seasons" were revised, and large additions made, the characteristics of the style were on the whole preserved. And one of the chief characteristics, due partly to the influence of Milton, and partly to the obvious fact that for Thomson with new thoughts and impressions to convey to his readers, the current and conventional vocabulary of poetry needed reinforcement, is an excessive use of latinisms.[3]

[1] "Poetical Epistle to Mr. Thomson on the First Edition of his 'Seasons'" (P.C.B., Vol. VIII, p. 504).
[2] "Letter to Mallett," August 11, 1726.
[3] Cp. Morel, *op. cit.*, pp. 419–424.

Thus in "Spring" we find, e.g., "*prelusive* drops," "the *amusive* arch" (the rainbow), "the torpid sap *detruded* to the root, etc., as well as numerous passages such as

> Joined to these
> Innumerous songsters in the freshening shade
> Of new-sprung leaves, their modulations mix
> Mellifluous. ("Spring," 607 foll.)

In "Summer" the epithet *gelid* appears with almost wearisome iteration, with other examples like *flexile* wave, *the fond sequacious bird*, etc., while the cloud that presages a storm is called "the small prognostic" and trees are "the noble sons of potent heat and floods." Continuous passages betray similar characteristics:

> From thee the sapphire, solid ether, takes
> Its hue cerulean and of evening tinct.
> ("Summer," 149 foll.)

Autumn furnishes even more surprising instances: the stag "*adhesive* to the track," the sands "strowed *bibulous* above," "forests huge *incult*," etc., as well as numerous passages of sustained latinism.[1]

In "Winter," which grew from an original 405 lines in 1726 to 1,069 lines in 1746, latinism of vocabulary is not prominent to the same extent as in the three previous books, but the following is a typical sample:

> Meantime in sable cincture shadows vast
> Deep-tinged, and damp and congregated clouds
> And all the vapoury turbulence of heaven
> Involves the face of things. (ll. 54 foll.)[2]

The revisions after 1730 do not show any great pruning, or less indulgence in these characteristics; rather the contrary, for many of them are additions

[1] E.g. ll. 766 foll, 828 foll, 881 foll.
[2] Cp. also ll. 126 foll.; 711 foll.

which did not appear until 1744. Now and then Thomson has changed his terms and epithets. Thus in the lines

> the potent sun
> *Melts into* limpid air the high-raised clouds
> (" Summer," 199)

the expression " melts into " has replaced the earlier " attenuates to."[1] One of the best of the emendations, at least as regards the disappearance of a latinism, is seen in " Summer " (48–9), where the second verse of the couplet,

> The meek-eyed morn appears, mother of dews,
> At first *faint-gleaming* in the dappled east

has replaced the

> *Mildly elucent* in the streaky east

of the earlier version. Often Thomson's latinisms produce no other effect on the reader than that of mere pedantry. Thus in passage such as

> See, where the winding vale its lavish stores
> *Irriguous* spreads. See, how the lily drinks
> The *latent* rill (" Spring," 494)

or

> the canvas smooth
> With glowing life *protuberant* (" Autumn," 136)

or

> The fallow ground laid open to the sun
> *Concoctive.* (*Ibid.*, 407)

or the description of the tempest

> Struggling through the *dissipated* grove
> (" Winter," 185)[2]

[1] Cp. also the respective versions of " Autumn," ll. 748 and 962.
[2] Cp. also " Summer," ll. 353, 376, 648; " Autumn," ll. 349, 894–895.

(where there is Latin *order* as well as diction), it is certain that the terms in question have little or no poetic value, and that simpler words in nearly every case would have produced greater effects. Now and then, as later in the case of Cowper, the pedantry is, we may suppose, deliberately playful, as when he speaks of the cattle that

> ruminate in the contiguous shade
> (" Winter," 86)

or indicates a partial thaw by the statement

> Perhaps the vale
> relents awhile to the reflected ray.
> (*Ibid.*, 784)

The words illustrated above are rarely, of course, Thomson's own coinage. Many of them (e.g. *detruded*, *hyperborean*, *luculent*, *relucent*, *turgent*) date from the sixteenth century or earlier, though from the earliest references to them given in the " New English Dictionary " it may be assumed that Thomson was not always acquainted with the sources where they are first found, and that to him their " poetic " use is first due. In some cases Milton was doubtless the immediate source from which Thomson took such words, to use them with a characteristic looseness of meaning.[1]

It would be too much to say that Thomson's use of such terms arises merely out of a desire to emulate the " grand style " ; it reflects rather his general predilection for florid and luxurious diction. Moreover, it has been noted that an analysis of his latinisms seems to point to a definite scheme of formation. Thus there is a distinct preference for certain groups of formations, such as adjectives in " -ive " (*affective*,

[1] Cp. " Milton," Raleigh, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-3.

amusive, excursive, etc), or in "-ous" (*irriguous, sequacious*), or Latin participle forms, such as *clamant, turgent, incult,* etc. In additions Latin words are frequently used in their original sense, common instances being *sordid, generous, error, secure, horrid, dome,* while his blank verse line was also characterized by the free use of latinized constructions.[1] Thomson's frequent use of the sandwiched noun, "flowing rapture bright" ("Spring," 1088), "gelid caverns woodbine-wrought," ("Summer," 461), "joyless rains obscure" ("Winter," 712), often with the second adjective used predicatively or adverbially,

> High seen the Seasons lead, *in sprightly dance*
> *Harmonious knit,* the rosy-fingered hours
> ("Summer," 1212)

is also worthy of note.

Yet it can hardly be denied that the language of "The Seasons" is in many respects highly artificial, and that Thomson was to all intents and purposes the creator of a special poetic diction, perhaps even more so than Gray, who had to bear the brunt of Wordsworth's fulminations. But on the whole his balance is on the right side; at a time when the majority of his contemporaries were either content to draw drafts on the conventional and consecrated words, phrases, and similes, or were sedulously striving to ape the polished plainness of Pope, he was able to show that new powers of expression could well be won from the language. His nature vocabulary alone is sufficient proof of the value of his contributions to the poetic wealth of the language, not a few of his new-formed compounds especially

[1] One of the most noteworthy is the constant employment of adjectives as adverbs in opposition (e.g., "the grand etherial bow, Shoots up *immense*"), a device used both by Milton and Pope, but by neither with anything like the freedom seen in "The Seasons."

being expressive and beautiful.[1] His latinisms are less successful because they can hardly be said to belong to any diction, and for the most part they must be classed among the "false ornaments" derided by Wordsworth;[2] not only do they possess none of that mysterious power of suggestion which comes to words in virtue of their employment through generations of prose and song, but also not infrequently their meaning is far from clear. They are never the spontaneous reflection of the poet's thought, but, on the contrary, they appear only too often to have been dragged in merely for effect.

This last remark applies still more forcibly to Somerville's "Chase," which appeared in 1735. Its author was evidently following in the wake of Thomson's blank verse, and with this aim freely allows himself the use of an artificial and inflated diction, as in many passages like

> Cull each salubrious plant, with bitter juice
> Concoctive stored, and potent to allay
> Each vicious ferment.

About the same time Edward Young was probably writing his "Night Thoughts," though the poem was not published until 1742. Here again the influence of Thomson is to be seen in the diction, though no doubt in this case there is also not a little that derives direct from Milton. Young has Latin formations like *terraqueous, to defecate, feculence, manumit,* as well as terms such as *avocation, eliminate,* and *unparadize,* used in their original sense. In the second instalment of the "Night Thoughts" there is a striking increase in the number of Latin terms, either borrowed directly, or at least formed on classical roots, some of which must

[1] Cf. Chapter VI, *infra.*

[2] In the "Essay Supplementary to the Preface," Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 949.

have been unintelligible to many readers. Thus *indagators* for "seekers," *fucus* for "false brilliance," *concertion* for "intimate agreement," and *cutaneous* for "external," "skin deep":

> All the distinctions of this little life
> Are quite cutaneous.[1]

It is difficult to understand the use of such terms when simple native words were ready at hand, and the explanation must be that they were thought to add to the dignity of the poem, and to give it a flavour of scholarship; for the same blemishes appear in most of the works published at this time. Thus in Akenside's "Pleasures of the Imagination" (1744) there is a similar use of latinized terms: *pensile planets, passion's fierce illapse, magnific praise,* though the tendency is best illustrated in such passages as

> that trickling shower
> Piercing through every crystalline convex
> Of clustering dewdrops to their flight opposed,
> Recoil at length where, concave all behind
> The internal surface of each glassy orb
> Repels their forward passage into air.

In "The Poet" there is a striking example of what can only be the pedantic, even if playful, use of a cumbrous epithet:

> On shelves *pulverulent*, majestic stands
> His library.

Similar examples are to be found in "The Art of Preserving Health" by John Armstrong, published

[1] That Young's readers and even his editors were occasionally puzzled is seen by the history of the term "concertion." This was the spelling of the first and most of the subsequent editions, including that of 1787, where the Glossary explains it as meaning "contrivance." But some editions (e.g. 1751) have "consertion," and some, according to Richardson ("New Dictionary," 1836), have "conception."

in the same year as Akenside's "Pleasures." The unpoetical nature of this subject may perhaps be Armstrong's excuse for such passages as

> Mournful eclipse or planets ill-combined
> Portend disastrous to the vital world;

but this latinizing tendency was perhaps never responsible for a more absurd periphrasis than one to be found in the second part of the poem, which treats of "Diet":

> Nor does his gorge the luscious bacon rue,
> Nor that which Cestria sends, tenacious paste
> Of solid milk.[1]

The high Miltonic manner was likewise attempted by John Dyer in "The Fleece," which appeared in 1757, and by James Grainger in "The Sugar Cane" (1764), to mention only the most important. Dyer, deservedly praised for his new and fresh descriptive diction, has not escaped this contagion of latinism: *the globe terraqueous, the cerule stream, rich sapinaceous loam, detersive bay salt*, etc., while elsewhere there are obvious efforts to recapture the Miltonic cadence. In "The Sugar Cane" the tendency is increased by the necessity thrust upon the poet to introduce numerous technical terms. Thus

> though all thy mills
> Crackling, o'erflow with a redundant juice
> Poor tastes the liquor; coction long demands
> And highest temper, ere it saccharize.

Meanwhile Joseph Warton had written his one blank verse poem "The Enthusiast" (1740), when he was only eighteen years old. But though both he and his brother Thomas are among the most important of the poets who show the influence of Milton most clearly, that influence reveals itself rather in the

[1] Armstrong's "gelid cistern" for "cold bath" has perhaps gained the honour of an unidentified quotation.

matter of thought than of form, and there is in "The Enthusiast" little of the diction that marred so many of the blank verse poems. Only here and there may traces be seen, as in the following passage:

> fairer she
> In innocence and homespun vestments dress'd
> Than if cerulean sapphires at her ears
> Shone pendent.

There is still less in the poems of Thomas Warton, who was even a more direct follower of Milton than his elder brother. There is scarcely one example of a Latinism in "The Pleasures of Melancholy," which is really a companion piece to "The Enthusiast." The truth is that it was Milton's early work—and especially "Il Penseroso"—that affected most deeply these early Romanticists, and even their blank verse is charged with the sentiments and phrases of Milton's octosyllabics. Thus the two poets, who were among the first to catch something of the true spirit of Milton, have little or nothing of the cumbersome and pedantic diction found so frequently in the so-called "Miltonics" of the eighteenth century, and this in itself is one indication of their importance in the earlier stages of the Romantic revival.

This is also true in the case of Collins and Gray, who are the real eighteenth century disciples of Milton. Collins's fondness for personified abstractions may perhaps be attributed to Milton's influence, but there are few, if any, traces of latinism in his pure and simple diction. Gray was probably influenced more than he himself thought by Milton, and like Milton he made for himself a special poetical language, which owes not a little to the works of his great exemplar. But Gray's keen sense of the poetical value of words, and his laborious precision and exactness in their use, kept him from any indulgence in coinages. Only one

or two latinisms are to be found in the whole of his work, and when these do occur they are such as would come naturally to a scholar, or as were still current in the language of his time. Thus in " The Progress of Poesy " he has

this *pencil* take,

where " pencil " stands for " brush " (Latin, *pensillum*) ; whilst in a translation from Statius he gives to *prevent* its latinized meaning

the champions, trembling at the sight
Prevent disgrace.

There is also a solitary example in the " Elegy " in the line

Can Honour's voice *provoke* the silent dust.

The contemporary fondness for blank verse had called forth the strictures of Goldsmith in his " Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning," and his own smooth and flowing couplets have certainly none of the pompous epithets which he there condemns. His diction, if we except an occasional use of the stock descriptive epithets, is admirable alike in its simplicity and directness, and the two following lines from " The Traveller " are, with one exception,[1] the only examples of latinisms to be found in his poems :

While sea-born gales their *gelid* wings expand,

and

Fall blunted from each *indurated* heart.

Dr. Johnson, who represented the extreme classicist position with regard to blank verse and other tendencies

[1] *Vacant* in the oft-quoted line from " The Deserted Village " (" The loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind "), where the word is used in its Latin sense of " free from care."

of the Romantic reaction, had a good deal to say in the aggregate about the poetical language of his predecessors and contemporaries. But the latinism of the time, which was widespread enough to have attracted his attention, does not seem to have provoked from him any critical comment. His own poetical works, even when we remember the "Vanity of Human Wishes," where plenty of instances of Latin idiom are to be found, are practically free from this kind of diction, though this does not warrant the inference that he disapproved of it. We know that his prose was latinized to a remarkable extent, so that his "sesquipedalian terminology" has been regarded as the fountain-head of that variety of English which delights in "big," high-sounding words. But his ideal, we may assume, was the polished and elegant diction of Pope, and his own verse is as free from pedantic formations as is "The Lives of the Poets," which perhaps represents his best prose.

It is in the works of a poet who, though he continues certain aspects of neo-classicism, yet announces unmistakably the coming of the new age, that we find a marked use of a deliberately latinized diction. Cowper has always received just praise for the purity of his language; he is, on the whole, singularly free from the artificialities and inversions which had marked the accepted poetic diction, but, on the other hand, his language is latinized to an extent that has perhaps not always been fully realized.

This is, however, confined to "The Task" and to the translation of the "Iliad." In the former case there is first a use of words freely formed on Latin roots, for most of which Cowper had no doubt abundant precedents,[1] but which, in some cases, must have been

[1] As in the case of Milton, Cowper's latinized words appear to have been floating about for a considerable period, though in most cases their first poetic use is apparently due to him.

coined by him, perhaps playfully in some instances; *twisted form vermicular; the agglomerated pile, the voluble and restless earth*, etc. Other characteristics of this latinized style are perhaps best seen in continuous passages such as

> he spares me yet
> These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines;
> And, though himself so polished, still reprieves
> The obsolete prolixity of shade
> (Bk. I, ll. 262 foll.)

or in such a mock-heroic fling as

> The stable yields a stercoraceous heap
> Impregnated with quick fermenting salts
> And potent to resist the freezing blast.
> (Bk. III, 463)[1]

On these and many similar occasions Cowper has turned his predilection to playful account, as also when he diagnoses the symptoms of gout as

> pangs arthritic that infest the toe
> Of libertine excess,

or speaks of monarchs and Kings as

> The arbiters of this terraqueous swamp.

There is still freer use of latinisms in the "Homer": [2] *her eyes caerulean, the point innocuous, piercing accents stridulous, the triturated barley, candent lightnings, the inherent barb, his stream cortiginous*, besides such passages as

> nor did the Muses spare to add
> Responsive melody of vocal sweets.

[1] Cp. also III, 229, 414; IV, 494.

[2] Apparently after he had done some pruning amongst them (*vide* "Letter" to Joseph Hill, March 29, 1793, Wright, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 390), and compare his footnote to the "Iliad," VII, 359, where he apologizes for his coinage *purpureal*.

The instances given above fully illustrate on the whole the use of a latinized diction in eighteenth century poetry.[1] It must not, however, be supposed that the fashion was altogether confined to the blank verse poems. Thus Matthew Prior in "Alma," or "The Progress of the Mind," has passages like

> the word obscene
> Or harsh which once elanced must ever fly
> Irrevocable,

whilst Richard Savage in his "Wanderer" indulges in such flights as

> his breath
> A nitrous damp that strikes petrific death.

One short stanza by William Shenstone, from his poem "Written in Spring, 1743," contains an obvious example in three out of its four lines:

> Again the labouring hind inverts the soil,
> Again the merchant ploughs the tumid wave,
> Another spring renews the soldier's toil,
> And finds me vacant in the rural cave.

But it is in the blank verse poems that the fashion is most prevalent, and it is there that it only too often becomes ludicrous. The blind Milton, dying, lonely and neglected, a stranger in a strange land, is hardly likely to have looked upon himself as the founder of a "school," or to have suspected to what base uses his lofty diction and style were to be put, within a few decades of his death, by a swarm of poetasters who fondly regarded themselves as his disciples.[2] The

[1] For an account of the parallelism between certain of the eighteenth century stock epithets and various words and phrases from the Latin poets, especially Virgil (e.g. "hollow" and "*cavus*": "liquid fountain" and *liquidi fontes*); see Myra Reynolds, "Nature in English Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth" (Chicago, 1909), pp. 46–49.

[2] Cf. Some apt remarks by Raleigh, "Milton," *op. cit.*, pp. 247 and 255.

early writers of blank verse, such as John Philips, frankly avowed themselves imitators of Milton, and there can be little doubt that in their efforts to catch something of the dignity and majesty of their model the crowd of versifiers who then appeared on the scene had recourse to high-sounding words and phrases, as well as to latinized constructions by which they hoped to elevate their style. The grand style of "Paradise Lost" was bound to suffer severely at the hands of imitators, and there can be little doubt but that much of the preposterous latinizing of the time is to be traced to this cause. At the same time the influence of the general literary tendencies of the Augustan ages is not to be ignored in this connexion. When a diction freely sprinkled with latinized terms is found used by writers like Thomson in the first quarter, and Cowper at the end of the century, it may perhaps also be regarded as a mannerism of style due in some degree to influences which were still powerful enough to affect literary workmanship. For it must be remembered that in the eighteenth century the traditional supremacy of Latin had not yet altogether died out: pulpit and forensic eloquence, as well as the great prose works of the period, still bore abundant traces of the persistency of this influence.[1] Hence it need not be at all surprising to find that it has invaded poetry. The use of latinized words and phrases gave, or was supposed to give, an air of culture to verse, and contemporary readers did not always, we may suppose, regard such language as a mere display of pedantry.

In this, as in other respects of the poetic output of the period, we may see a further reflex of the general literary atmosphere of the first half or so of the eighteenth century. There was no poetry of the

[1] Cp. Saintsbury, "History of Literary Criticism" (1900–1904), Vol. II, p. 479, note 1.

highest rank, and not a great deal of *poetical* poetry; the bulk of the output is "poetry without an atmosphere." The very qualities most admired in prose—lucidity, correctness, absence of "enthusiasm"—were such as were approved for poetry; even the Romantic forerunners, with perhaps the single exception of Blake, felt the pressure of the prosaic atmosphere of their times. No doubt had a poet of the highest order appeared he would have swept away much of the accumulated rubbish and fashioned for himself a new poetic language, as Thomson tried, and Wordsworth later thought to do. But he did not appear, and the vast majority of the practitioners were content to ring the changes on the material they found at hand, and were not likely to dream of anything different.

It is thus not sufficient to say that the "rapid and almost simultaneous diffusion of this purely cutaneous eruption," to borrow an appropriate description from Lowell, was due solely to the potent influence of Milton. It reflects also the average conception of poetry held throughout a good part of the eighteenth century, a conception which led writers to seek in mere words qualities which are to be found in them only when they are the reflex of profound thought or powerful emotion. In short, latinism in eighteenth century poetry may be regarded as a literary fashion, akin in nature to the stock epithets and phrases of the "descriptive" poetry, which were later to be unsparingly condemned as the typical eighteenth century poetical diction.

Of the poetic value of these latinized words little need be said. Whether or no they reflect a conscious effort to extend, enrich, or renew the vocabulary of English poetry, they cannot be said to have added much to the expressive resources of the language. This is not, of course, merely because they are of

direct Latin origin. We know that around the central Teutonic core of English there have slowly been built up two mighty strata of Latin and Romance formations, which, in virtue of their long employment by writers in prose and verse, as well as on the lips of the people, have slowly acquired that force and picturesqueness which the poet needs for his purpose. But the latinized words of the eighteenth century are on a different footing. To us, nowadays, there is something pretentious and pedantic about them: they are artificial formations or adoptions, and not living words. English poets from time to time have been able to give a poetical colouring to such words,[1] and the eighteenth century is not without happy instances of this power. James Thomson here and there wins real poetic effects from his latinized vocabulary, as in such a passage as

> Here lofty trees to ancient song unknown
> The noble sons of potent heat and floods
> Prone-rushing from the clouds, rear high to heaven
> Their thorny stems, and broad around them throw
> Meridian gloom. ("Summer," 653 foll.)[2]

The "return to Nature," of which Thomson was perhaps the most noteworthy pioneer, brought back all the sights and sounds of outdoor life as subjects fit and meet for the poet's song, and it is therefore of some interest, in the present connexion, to note that Wordsworth himself, who also knew how to make excellent use of high-sounding Latin formations, has perhaps nowhere illustrated this faculty better than in the famous passage on the Yew Trees of Borrowdale:

> Those fraternal Four of Borrowdale
> Joined in one solemn and capacious grove:

[1] Cp. Elton, "Survey of English Literature," 1830–1880 (1920), Vol. II, p. 17, remarks on Rossetti's diction.
[2] Cp. also Morel, *op. cit.*, pp. 423–424.

> Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
> Of intertwisted fibres serpentine
> Upcoiling, and inveterately convolved;
> Nor uninformed with Phantasy, and looks
> That threaten the profane.

But the bulk of eighteenth century latinisms fall within a different category; rarely do they convey, either in themselves or in virtue of their context, any of that mysterious power of association which constitutes the poetic value of words and enables the writer, whether in prose or verse, to convey to his reader delicate shades of meaning and suggestion which are immediately recognized and appreciated.

CHAPTER V

ARCHAISM IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

ONE of the earliest and most significant of those literary manifestations which were to culminate in the triumph of Romanticism was a new enkindled interest in the older English writers. The attitude of the great body of the so-called "Classicists" towards the earlier English poetry was not altogether one of absolute contempt: it was rather marked by that indifference which is the outcome of ignorance. Readers and authors, with certain illustrious exceptions, were totally unacquainted with Chaucer, and though Spenser fared better, even those who did know him did not at first consider him worthy of serious study.[1] Yet the Romantic rebels, by their attempts to imitate Spenser, and to reveal his poetic genius to a generation of unbelievers, did work of immediate and lasting value.

It is perhaps too much to claim that some dim perception of the poetic value of old words contributed in any marked degree to this Spenserian revival in the eighteenth century. Yet it can hardly be doubted that Spenser's language, imperfectly understood and at first considered "barbarous," or "Gothic," or at best merely "quaint," came ultimately to be regarded as supplying something of that atmosphere of "old romance" which was beginning

[1] *Vide* Lounsbury, "Studies in Chaucer" (1892), Vol. III.

to captivate the hearts and minds of men. This is not to say that there was any conscious or deliberate intention of freshening or revivifying poetic language by an infusion of old or " revived " words. But the Spenserian and similar imitations naturally involved the use of such words, and they thus made an important contribution to the Romantic movement on its purely formal side ; they played their part in destroying the pseudo-classical heresy that the best, indeed the only, medium for poetic expression was the polished idiom of Pope and his school.

The poets and critics of Western Europe, who, as we have seen, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had busied themselves with the question of refining and embellishing their mother tongue, had advocated among other means the revival of archaic and obsolete words. Spenser himself, we know, had definitely adopted this means in the " Shepherds Kalendar," though the method of increasing his poetical vocabulary had not been approved by all of his contemporaries and successors. Milton, when forming the special poetical language he needed for his immense task, confined himself largely to " classical " coinages, and his archaisms, such as *swinkt*, *rathe*, *nathless*, *frore*, are comparatively few in number.[1]

Dryden's attitude towards old words was stated with his customary good sense, and though his modernization of Chaucer gave him endless opportunities of experimenting with them, he never abused the advantage, and indeed in all his work there is but little trace of the deliberate revival of obsolete or archaic words. In the " Fables " may be found a few words such as *sounded*[2] (swounded) which had been

[1] " Scrannel " is either Milton's coinage or a borrowing from some dialect (N.E.D.).

[2] This of course is used by many later writers, and was perhaps not regarded in Dryden's time as an archaism.

used by Malory and Spenser, *laund* for (lawn), *rushed* (cut-off), etc., and he has also Milton's *rathe*. Dryden, however, is found using a large number of terms which were evidently obsolete in the literary language, but which, it may be supposed, still lingered in the spoken language, and especially in the provincial dialects. He is fond of the word *ken* (to know), and amongst other examples are *stead* (place), *to lease* (glean), *shent* (rebuked), *hattered* (worn out), *dorp* (a village, *buries* (burrows), etc. Dryden is also apparently responsible for the poetic use of the term "*doddered*," a word of somewhat uncertain meaning, which, after his time and following his practice, came into common use as an epithet for old oaks, and, rarely, for other trees.[1]

As might be expected, there are few traces of the use of obsolete or archaic words in the works of Pope. The "correct" style did not favour innovations in language, whether they consisted in the formation of new words or in the revival of old forms. Pope stated in a letter to Hughes, who edited Spenser's works (1715), that "Spenser has been ever a favourite poet to me,"[2] but among the imitations "done by the Author in his Youth," there is "The Alley," a very coarse parody of Spenser, which does not point to any real appreciation or understanding on the part of Pope. In the first book of the "Dunciad" as we have seen, he indulged in a fling at the antiquaries, especially Hearne and those who took pleasure in our older literature, by means of a satiric stanza written in a pseudo-archaic language.[3] But his language is much freer than that of Dryden from archaisms or provincialisms. He has forms like *gotten*, *whelm* (over-

[1] "New English Dictionary."

[2] "Works," ed. Courthope and Elwin, Vol. X, p. 120.

[3] The prevailing ignorance of earlier English is illustrated in that stanza by Pope's explanation of the expression "mister wight," which he had taken from Spenser, as "uncouth mortal."

whelm) *rampires* (ramparts), *swarths*, *catched* (caught), *thrice-ear'd* (ploughed), etc. Neither Dryden nor Pope, it may be said, would ever have dreamed of reviving an archaic word simply because it was an old word, and therefore to be regarded as "poetical." To imagine this is to attribute to the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a state of feeling which is essentially modern, and which lends a glamour to old and almost forgotten words. Dryden would accept any word which he considered suitable for his purpose, but he always insisted that old words had to prove their utility, and that they had otherwise no claim to admission to the current vocabulary. Pope, however, we may suspect, would not admit any words not immediately intelligible to his readers, or requiring a footnote to explain them.

Meanwhile, in the year 1715, there had appeared the first attempt to give a critical text of Spenser, when John Hughes published his edition of the poet's works in six volumes, together with a biography, a glossary, and some critical remarks.[1] The obsolete terms which Hughes felt himself obliged to explain[2] include many, such as *aghast*, *baleful*, *behest*, *bootless*, *carol*, *craven*, *dreary*, *forlorn*, *foray*, *guerdon*, *plight*, *welkin*, *yore*, which are now for the most part familiar words, though forty years later Thomas Warton in his "Observations on The Faerie Queene" (1754) is found annotating many similar terms. The well-known "Muses' Library," published thirteen years previously, had described itself as "A General Collection of almost all the old and valuable poetry extant, now so industriously inquir'd after"; it begins with Langland and reflects the renewed interest that was

[1] "The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser, in 6 Vols. with a glossary explaining the old and obscure words. Published by Mr. Hughes; London."

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 115–140.

arising in the older poets. But there is as yet little evidence of any general and genuine appreciation of either the spirit or the form of the best of the earlier English poetry. The Spenserian imitators undoubtedly felt that their diction must look so obsolete and archaic as to call for a glossary of explanation, and these glossaries were often more than necessary, not only to explain the genuine old words, but also because of the fact that in many cases the supposedly "Spenserian" terms were spurious coinages devoid of any real meaning at all.

Before considering these Spenserian imitations it must not be forgotten that there were, prior to these attempts and alongside of them, kindred efforts to catch the manner and style of Chaucer. This practice received its first great impulse from Dryden's famous essay in praise of Chaucer, and the various periodicals and miscellanies of the first half of the eighteenth century bear witness to the fact that many eminent poets, not to mention a crowd of poetasters, thought it their duty to publish a poetical tribute couched in the supposed language and manner of Chaucer.

These attempts were nearly all avowedly humorous,[1] and seemed based on a belief that the very language of Chaucer was in some respects suitable comic material for a would-be humorous writer. Such an attitude was obviously the outcome of a not unnatural ignorance of the historical development of the language. Chaucer's language had long been regarded as almost a dead language, and this attitude had persisted even to the eighteenth century, so that it was felt that a mastery of the language of the "Canterbury Tales" required prolonged study. Even Thomas Warton, speaking of Chaucer, was of the opinion that "his uncouth and unfamiliar language disgusts and deters

[1] As in Prior's "Susanna and the Two Elders" and "Erle Robert's Mice" (1712).

many readers."[1] Hence it is not surprising that there was a complete failure to catch, not only anything of the real spirit of Chaucer, but also anything that could be described as even a distant approach to his language. The imitators seemed to think that fourteenth century English could be imitated by the use of common words written in an uncommon way, or of strange terms with equally strange meanings. The result was an artificial language that could never have been spoken by anybody, often including words to which it is impossible to give any definite sense. It would seem that only two genuine Chaucerian terms had really been properly grasped, and this pair, *ne* and *eke*, is in consequence worked to death. Ignorance of the earlier language naturally led to spurious grammatical forms, of which the most favoured was a singular verb form ending in *-en*. Gay, for instance, has, in a poem of seventeen lines, such phrases as "It *maken* doleful song," "There *spreaden* a rumour,"[2] whilst Fenton writes,

If in mine quest thou *falsen* me.[3]

The general style and manner of these imitations, with their "humorous" tinge, their halting verse, bad grammar, and impossible inflections are well illustrated in William Thompson's "Garden Inscription—Written in Chaucer's Bowre," though more serious efforts were not any more successful.

The death of Pope, strangely enough, called forth more than one attempt, among them being Thomas Warton's imitation of the characterization of the birds

[1] "Observations on the Færie Queene of Spenser," 1754.

[2] "An Answer to the Sompner's Prologue in Chaucer," printed anon. in "Lintott's Miscellany," entitled "Poems on Several Occasions" (1717), p. 147.

[3] "A Tale Devised in the Plesaunt manere of Gentil Maister Jeoffrey Chaucer" ("Poets of Great Britain," 1794, Vol. VII, p. 674).

from the " Parliament of Fowles." [1] Better known at the time was the monody " Musæus," written by William Mason, " To the memory of Mr. Pope." Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton are represented as coming to mourn the inevitable loss of him who was about to die, and Mason endeavoured to reproduce their respective styles, " Tityrus " (Chaucer) holding forth in this strain:

> Mickle of wele betide thy houres last
> For mich gode wirke to me don and past.
> For syn the days whereas my lyre ben strongen,
> And deftly many a mery laie I songen,
> Old Time which alle things don maliciously,
> Gnawen with rusty tooth continually,
> Grattrid my lines, that they all cancrid ben
> Till at the last thou smoothen hem hast again.

It is astonishing to think that this mechanical imitation, with its harsh and forced rhythm, and its almost doggerel language, was regarded at the time as a successful reproduction of Chaucer's manner and style. But probably before 1775, when Tyrwhitt announced his rediscovery of the secret of Chaucer's rhythm, few eighteenth century readers suspected its presence at all.

But the Chaucerian imitations were merely a literary fashion predoomed to failure. It was not in any way the result of a genuine influence of the early English poetry on contemporary taste, and thus it was not even vitalized, as was the Spenserian revival, by a certain vague and undefined desire to catch something at least of the spirit of the " Faerie Queene." The Spenserian imitations had a firmer foundation, and because the best of them did not confine their ambition altogether to the mechanical imitation of

[1] " Poems on Several Occasions," by the Rev. Thomas Warton, 1748, p. 30.

Spenser's style in the narrower sense they achieved a greater measure of success.

It is significant to note that among the first attempts at a Spenserian imitation was that made by one of the foremost of the Augustans. This was Matthew Prior, who in 1706 published his "Ode, Humbly Inscribed to the Queen on the Glorious success of Her Majesty's Arms, Written in Imitation of Spenser's Style." [1] We are surprised, however, to find when we have read his Preface, that Prior's aim was in reality to write a poem on the model of Horace and of Spenser. The attitude in which he approached Spenser's language is made quite clear by his explanation. He has "avoided such of his words as I found too obsolete. I have however retained some few of them to make the colouring look more like Spenser's." Follows then a list of such words, including "*behest*, command; *band*, army; *prowess*, strength; *I weet*, I know; *I ween*, I think; *whilom*, heretofore; and two or three more of that kind." Though later in his Preface Prior speaks of the *curiosa felicitas* of Spenser's diction, it is evident that there is little or no real understanding or appreciation.

Now began a continuous series of Spenserian imitations,[2] of which, with a few exceptions, the only distinguishing characteristic was a small vocabulary of obsolete words, upon which the poetasters could draw for the "local colour" considered necessary. In the majority of cases the result was a purely artificial language, probably picked haphazard from the "Faerie Queene," and often used without any definite

[1] "Poems on Several Occasions," London, 1711, pp. 203–223.

[2] *Vide* List given by Phelps, "The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement" (1899), Appendix I, p. 175; and cf. an exhaustive list, including complete glossaries, given in "Das Altertümliche im Wortschatz der Spenser-Nachahmungen des 18 Jahrhunderts," by Karl Reining (Strassburg, 1912).

idea of its meaning or appropriateness.[1] Fortunately, one or two real poets were attracted by the idea, and in due course produced their "imitations."

William Shenstone (1714–1763) is perhaps worthy of being ranked amongst these, in virtue at least of "The Schoolmistress," which appeared in its final shape in 1742. Shenstone himself confesses that the poem was not at first intended to be a serious imitation, but his study of Spenser led him gradually to something like a real appreciation of the earlier poet.[2]

"The Schoolmistress" draws upon the usual common stock of old words: *whilom, mickle, perdie, eke, thik*, etc., but often, as in the case of Spenser himself, the obsolete terms have a playful and humorous effect:

> For they in gaping wonderment abound
> And think, no doubt, she been the greatest wight on ground.

Nor is there lacking a quaint, wistful tenderness, as in the description of the refractory schoolboy, who, after being flogged,

> Behind some door, in melancholy thought,
> Mindless of food, he, dreary caitiff, pines,
> Ne for his fellows joyaunce careth aught,
> But to the wind all merriment resigns.

Hence "The Schoolmistress" is no mere parody or imitation: there is a real and tender humanity in the description of the village school (adumbrating, it would seem, Goldsmith's efforts with a similar theme), whilst the judicious use of Spenser's stanza and the

[1] E.g. Robert Lloyd, 1733–1764, in his "Progress of Envy" (Anderson, Vol. V), defines *wimpled* as "hung down"; "The Squire of Dames," by Moses Mendez (1700–1738) has many old words ("benty," etc.), which are often open to the suspicion of being manufactured archaisms.

[2] *Vide* his letter to Graves, June, 1742.—"Works," Vol. III, p. 63 (1769).

sprinkling of his old words help to invest the whole poem with an atmosphere of genuine and unaffected humour.

The next Spenserian whose work merits attention is William Thompson, who, it would seem, had delved not a little into the Earlier English poetry, and who was one of the first to capture something of the real atmosphere of the "Faerie Queene." His "Epithalamium"[1] and "The Nativity,"[2] which appeared in 1736, are certainly among the best of the imitations. It is important to note that, while there is a free use of supposedly archaic words, with the usual list of *certes*, *perdie*, *sikerly*, *hight*, as well as others less common, such as *belgards* ("beautiful looks"), *bonnibel* ("beautiful virgin"), there is no abuse of the practice. Not a little of the genuine spirit of Spenser's poetry, with its love of nature and outdoor life, has been caught and rendered without any lavish recourse to an artificial and mechanical diction, as a stanza from "The Nativity," despite its false rhymes, will perhaps show :

> Eftsoons he spied a grove, the Season's pride,
> All in the centre of a pleasant glade,
> Where Nature flourished like a virgin bride,
> Mantled with green, with hyacinths inlaid,
> And crystal-rills o'er beds of lilies stray'd :
> The blue-ey'd violet and King-cup gay,
> And new blown roses, smiling sweetly red,
> Out-glow'd the blushing infancy of Day
> While amorous west-winds kist their fragrant souls away.

This cannot altogether be said of the "Hymn to May" published over twenty years later,[3] despite

[1] "Poems on Several Occasions," by William Thompson, M.A., etc., Oxford, 1757, pp. 1–13.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 58–68.
[3] "The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper," by Dr. Samuel Johnson, 21 Vols. (London, 1810), Vol. XV, p. 32.

the fact that Thompson himself draws attention to the fact that he does not consider that a genuine Spenserian imitation may be produced by scattering a certain number of obsolete words through the poem. Nevertheless, we find that he has sprinkled his "Hymn" plentifully with "obsolete" terms, though they include a few, such as *purfled*, *dispredden*, *goodlihead*, that were not the common property of the poetasters. His explanations of the words so used show that not a few of them were used with little knowledge of their original meaning, as when he defines *glen* [1] as "a country hamlet," or explains *perdie* as "an old word for saying anything." It is obvious also that many obsolete terms are often simply stuck in the lines when their more modern equivalents would have served equally well, as for instance,

> Full suddenly the seeds of joy *recure* ("recover"),

or

> Myrtles to Venus *algates* sacred been.

With these reservations the diction of Thompson's poems is pure and unaffected, and the occasional happy use of archaism is well illustrated in more than one stanza of "The Nativity."

It is generally agreed that the best of all the Spenserian imitations is "The Castle of Indolence," which James Thomson published two months before his death in 1748.[2] Yet even in this case there is evident a sort of quiet condescension, as if it were in Thompson's mind that he was about to draw the

[1] Thompson has taken this wrong meaning direct with the word itself from Spenser, "Shepherds Kalendar," April, l. 26, where *glen* is glossed by E.K. as "a country hamlet or borough."

[2] Cp. Joseph Warton's "Essay on Pope," Vol. I, p. 366 (4th edition, 1782). Wordsworth, too, as we know, called it a "fine poem" and praised it for its harmonious verse and pure diction, but we may imagine that he was praising it for its own sake without regard to its merits as a Spenserian imitation (*vide* Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 949).

attention of his eighteenth century audience to something quaint and old-fashioned, but which had yet a charm of its own. "The obsolete words," he writes in his "advertisement" to the poem, "and a simplicity of diction in some of the lines, which borders on the ludicrous, were necessary to make the imitation more perfect." Hence he makes use of a number of words intended to give an archaic air to his poem, including the usual *certes*, *withouten*, *sheen*, *perdie*, *weet*, *pleasaunce*, *ycleped*, etc. To the first edition was appended a page of explanation of these and other "obsolete words used in this poem": altogether between seventy and eighty such words are thus glossed, the large majority of which are familiar enough nowadays, either as part of the ordinary vocabulary, or as belonging especially to the diction of poetry.

Though the archaisms are sometimes scattered in a haphazard manner, they are not used with such mechanical monotony as is obvious in the bulk of the Spenserian imitations. In both cantos there are long stretches without a single real or pseudo-archaism, and indeed, when Thomson is indulging in one of the moral or the didactic surveys characteristic of his age, as, for instance, when the bard, invoked by Sir Industry, breaks into a long tirade on the Supreme Perfection (Canto II, 47–61) his diction is the plain and unadorned idiom perfected by Pope.[1] Yet Thompson occasionally yields to the fascination of the spurious form in *-en*,[2] as

> But these I *passen* by with nameless numbers moe
> (Canto I., 56)

[1] There are at least forty stanzas in the First Canto, without a single archaic form, and an equal proportion in Canto Two: Cf. Morel, *op. cit.*, pp. 629–630.

[2] "The letter *y*," he naïvely says in his "Glossary," "is frequently placed at the beginning of a word by Spenser, to lengthen it a syllable, and *en* at the end of a word, for the same reason."

or

> And taunts he *casten* forth most bitterly.
> (Canto II 78)

Sometimes it would seem that his archaisms owe their appearance to the necessities of rhyme, as in

> So worked the wizard wintry storms to swell
> As heaven and earth they would together *mell*
> (Canto I, 43)

and

> Or the brown fruit with which the woodlands teem :
> The same to him glad summer, or the winter *breme*.
> (Canto II, 7)

There are lines too where we feel that the archaisms have been dragged in ; for example,

> As *soot* this man could sing as morning lark
> (Canto I, 57)

(though there is here perhaps the added charm of a Chaucerian reminiscence) ; or

> *replevy* cannot be
> From the strong, iron grasp of vengeful destiny.
> (Canto II, 32)

But, on the whole, he has been successful in his efforts, half-hearted as they sometimes seem, to give an old-world atmosphere to his poem by a sprinkling of archaisms, and it is then that we feel in *The Castle of Indolence* something at least of the beauty and charm of " the poet's poet," as in the well-known stanza describing the valley of Idlesse with its

> waters sheen
> That, as they bickered[1] through the sunny glade,
> Though restless still, themselves a lulling murmur made.
> (Canto I, 3)

[1] Thompson seems to have been the first to use the word *bicker* as applied to running water, an application which was later to receive the sanction of Scott and Tennyson (N.E.D.).

Though the Spenserian imitations continued beyond the year which saw the birth of Wordsworth,[1] it is not necessary to mention further examples, except perhaps that of William Mickle, who, in 1767, published "The Concubine," a Spenserian imitation of two cantos, which afterwards appeared in a later edition (1777) under the title "Sir Martyn." Like his predecessors, Mickle made free use of obsolete spellings and words, while he added the usual glossary, which is significant as showing at the end of the eighteenth century, about the time when Tyrwhitt was completing his edition of Chaucer, not only the artificial character of this "Spenserian diction," but also the small acquaintance of the average man of letters with our earlier language.[2]

It must not be assumed, of course, that all the "obsolete" words used by the imitators were taken directly from Spenser. Words like *nathless*, *rathe*, *hight*, *sicker*, *areeds*, *cleeped*, *hardiment*, *felly*, etc., had continued in fairly common use until the seventeenth century, though actually some of them were regarded even then as archaisms. Thus *cleoped*, though never really obsolete, is marked by Blount in 1656 as "Saxon"; *sicker*, extensively employed in Middle English, is rarely found used after 1500 except by Scotch writers, though it still remains current in northern dialects. On the other hand, not a few words were undoubtedly brought directly back into literature from the pages of Spenser, among them being *meed*, *sheen* (boasting an illustrious descent from *Beowulf*

[1] Among the last examples was Beattie's "Minstrel" (1771–74), which occasioned some of Gray's dicta on the use of archaic and obsolete words.

[2] Spenserian "forgeries" had also made their appearance as early as in 1713, when Samuel Croxall had attempted to pass off two Cantos as the original work of "England's Arch-Poet, Spenser" (2nd edition, London, 1714). In 1747, John Upton made a similar attempt, though probably in neither case were the discoveries intended to be taken seriously.

through Chaucer), *erst*, *elfin*, *paramour*. Others, like *scrannel*, and apparently also *tedded*, were made familiar by Milton's use, the former either being the poet's own coinage or his borrowing from some dialect or other. On the other hand, very many of the "revived" words failed to take root at all, such as *faitours*, which Spenser himself had apparently revived, and also his coinage *singult*, though Scott is found using the latter form.

As has been said, the crowd of poetasters who attempted to reproduce Spenser's spirit and style thought to do so by merely mechanical imitation of what they regarded as his "quaint" or "ludicrous" diction. Between them and any possibility of grasping the perennial beauty and charm of the "poet's poet" there was a great gulf fixed, whilst, altogether apart from this fatal limitation, their parodies were little likely to have even ephemeral success, for parody presupposes in its readers at least a little knowledge and appreciation of the thing parodied. But there were amongst the imitators one or two at least who, we may imagine, were able to find in the melody and romance of "The Faerie Queene" an avenue of escape from the prosaic pressure of their times. In the case of William Thompson, Shenstone, and the author of the "Castle of Indolence," the influence of Spenser revealed itself as in integral and vital part of the Romantic reaction, for these, being real poets, had been able to recapture something at least of the colour, music, and fragrance of their original. And not only did these, helped by others whose names have all but been forgotten restore a noble stanza form to English verse. Even their mechanical imitation of Spenser's language was not without its influence, for it cannot be doubted that these attempts to write in an archaic or pseudo-archaic style did not a little to free poetry from the shackles of a conventional language.

This process was greatly helped by that other aspect of the eighteenth century revival of the past which was exemplified in the publication of numerous collections of old ballads and songs.[1] There is, of course, as Macaulay long ago noted, a series of conventional epithets that is one mark of the genuine ballad manner, but the true ballad language was not a lifeless stereotyped diction. It consisted of "plain English without any trimmings." The ballads had certain popular mannerisms (*the good greenwood, the wan water*, etc.), but they were free from the conventional figures of speech, or such rhetorical artifices as personification and periphrasis.

Hence it is not surprising that at first their fresh and spontaneous language was regarded, when contrasted with the artificial and refined diction of the time, as "barbarous" or "rude." Thus Prior thought it necessary to paraphrase the old ballad of the "Nut Brown Maid" into his insipid "Henry and Emma" (1718), but a comparison of only a few lines of the original with the banality of the modernized version is sufficient testimony to the refreshing and vivifying influence of such collections as the "Reliques."

The tendency to present the old ballads in an eighteenth century dress had soon revealed itself; at least, the editors of the early collections often felt themselves obliged to apologize for the obsolete style of their material.[2] But in 1760 the first attempt at a critical text appeared when Edward Capell, the famous Shakespearian editor, published his "Prolusions"; or "Select Pieces of Antient Poetry—

[1] See Phelps, *op. cit*, Chap. VIII, and Grace R. Trenery, "Ballad Collections of the Eighteenth Century," "Modern Language Review," July, 1915, pp. 283 foll.

[2] *Vide* "Preface to A Collection of Old Ballads," 3 vols. (1723–52), and cf. Benjamin Wakefield's "Warbling Muses" (1749), Preface.

compil'd with great Care from their several Originals, and offer'd to the Publick as specimens of the Integrity that should be found in the Editions of worthy Authors." Capell's care was almost entirely directed to ensuring textual accuracy, but the "Nut-Browne Maid," the only ballad included, receives sympathetic mention in his brief *Preface.*[1]

Five years later, the most famous of all the ballad collections appeared, Thomas Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry" (1765). The nucleus of Percy's collection was a certain manuscript in a handwriting of Charles I's time, containing 191 songs and ballads, but he had also had access to various other manuscript collections, whilst he was quite ready to acknowledge that he had filled gaps in his originals with stanzas and, in some cases, with nearly entire poems of his own composition. Much censure has been heaped upon Percy for his apparent lax ideas on the functions of an editor, but in decking out his "parcel of old ballads" in the false and affected style of his age, he was only doing his best to meet the taste of his readers. He himself passes judgment on his own labours, when, alongside of the genuine old ballads, with their freshness and simplicity of diction, he places his own "pruned" or "refined" versions, or additions, garbed in a sham and sickly idiom.

It was not until over a century later, when Percy's folio manuscript was copied and printed,[2] that the extent of his additions, alterations, and omissions were fully realized, though at the same time it was

[1] Yet thirty years later the collections of Joseph Ritson, the last and best of the eighteenth century editors, failed to win acceptance. His strictly accurate versions of the old songs and ballads were contemptuously dismissed by the "Gentleman's Magazine" (August, 1790) as "the compilation of a peevish antiquary."

[2] "Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript," edited Furnivall and Hales, 4 vols. (1867–68).

admitted that the pruning and refining was not unskilfully done.

Nevertheless the influence of the "Reliques," as a vital part of the Romantic revival, was considerable:[1] it was as if a breath of "the wind on the heath" had swept across literature and its writers, bringing with it an invigorating fragrance and freshness, whilst, on the purely formal side, the genuine old ballads, which Percy had culled and printed untouched, no doubt played their part in directing the attention of Wordsworth to the whole question of the language of poetry. And when the great Romantic manifestoes on the subject of "the language of metrical composition" were at length launched, their author was not slow to bear witness to the revivifying influence of the old ballads on poetic form. "Our poetry," he wrote, "has been absolutely redeemed by it. I do not think that there is an able writer in verse of the present day who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligations to the "Reliques."[2]

The year before the appearance of the "Reliques," Thomas Chatterton had published his "Rowley Poems," and this attempt of a poet of genius to pass off his poems as the work of a mediaeval English writer is another striking indication of the new Romantic spirit then asserting itself. As for the pseudo-archaic language in which Chatterton with great labour clothed his "revivals," there is no need to say much. It was a thoroughly artificial language, compiled, as Skeat has shown, from various sources, such as John Kersey's "Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum," three editions of which had appeared before 1721. In this work there are included a considerable number of obsolete words, chiefly from Spenser and

[1] *Vide* Henry A. Beers, "A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century," 1899, Chap. VIII, pp. 298–302.

[2] Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 950.

his contemporaries, marked " O," and in some cases erroneously explained. This dictionary was the chief source of Chatterton's vocabulary, many words of which the young poet took apparently without any definite idea of their meaning.[1]

Yet in the Rowley poems there are passages where the pseudo-archaic language is quite in keeping with the poet's theme and treatment, whilst here and there we come across epithets and lines which, even in their strange dress, are of a wild and artless sweetness, such as

> Where thou mayst here the sweete night-lark chant,
> Or with some mocking brooklet sweetly glide,

or the whole of the first stanza of the famous " An Excelente Balade of Charitie," where the old words help to transport us at once into the fictitious world which Chatterton had made for himself. Perhaps, as has been suggested, the " Rowley dialect " was not, as we nowadays, with Skeat's analysis in our minds, are a little too apt to believe, a deliberate attempt to deceive, but rather reflected an attempt to escape from the dead abstract diction of the period.[2]

Apart from this special aspect of the Romantic revival marked by a tendency to look back lovingly to the earlier English poetry, there are few traces of the use of archaic and obsolete words, at least of such words used consciously, in eighteenth century poetry. The great poets of the century make little or no use of them. Collins has no examples, but Gray, who began by advocating the poet's right to use obsolete

[1] " Chatterton—Poetical Works," with an Essay on the Rowley Poems, by W. W. Skeat, and a memoir by Bell (2 vols., 1871–1875); and *vide* Tyrwhitt, " Poems supposed to have been written at Bristol by Thomas Rowley and others in the fifteenth century " (London, 1777).

[2] *Vide* Oswald Doughty, " English Lyric in the Age of Reason " (1922), p. 251.

words, and later seemed to recant, now and then uses an old term, as when in his translation from Dante he writes :

> The anguish that unuttered *nathless* wrings
> My inmost heart.

Blake, however, it is interesting to note, often used archaic forms, or at least archaic spellings,[1] as *Tyger*, *antient* (" To the Muses "), " the *desart* wild " (" The Little Girl Lost "), as well as such lines as

> In lucent words my darkling verses dight
> (" Imitation of Spenser ")

or

> So I piped with merry *chear*.
> (Introduction to " Songs of Innocence ")

Perhaps by these means the poet wished to give a quaint or old-fashioned look to his verses, though it is to be remembered that most of them occur in the " Poetical Sketches," which are avowedly Elizabethan.

The use of archaic and obsolete words in the eighteenth century was then chiefly an outcome of that revival of the past which was one of the characteristics of the new Romantic movement, and which was later to find its culmination in the works of Scott. The old words used by the eighteenth century imitators of Spenser were not often used, we may imagine, because poets saw in them poetical beauty and value ; most often they were the result of a desire to catch, as it were, something of the " local colour " of the " Faerie Queene," just as modern writers nowadays, poets and novelists alike, often draw upon local dialects for new means of expression. The Spenserian imitations recovered not a few words, such as *meed*,

[1] *Vide* John Sampson, " The Poetical Works of William Blake " (Oxford, 1905), Preface, viii.

sheen, dight, glen,[1] which have since been regarded as belonging especially to the diction of poetry, and when the Romantic revival had burst into life the impulse, which had thus been unconsciously given, was continued by some of its great leaders. Scott, as is well known, was an enthusiastic lover of our older literature, especially the ballads, from which he gleaned many words full of a beauty and charm which won for them immediate admission into the language of poetry; at the same time he was able to find many similar words in the local dialects of the lowlands and the border. Perhaps in this work he had been inspired by his famous countryman, Robert Burns, who by his genius had raised his native language, with its stores of old and vivid words and expressions, to classical rank.[2]

Nevertheless it is undoubted that the main factor in the new Romantic attitude towards old words had been the eighteenth century imitations and collections of our older English literature. Coleridge, it is to be remembered, made free use of archaisms; in the "Ancient Mariner," there are many obsolete forms: *loon, eftsoons, uprist, gramercy, gossameres, corse,* etc. besides those which appeared in the first edition, and were altered or omitted when the poem reappeared in 1800. Wordsworth, it is true, made no use of archaic diction, whether in the form of deliberate revivals, or by drafts on the dialects, which, following the great example of Burns, and in virtue of his own "theories," he might have been expected to explore. Nevertheless the "theories" concerning poetical language which he propounded and maintained are not without

[1] Until the middle of the eighteenth century the form *glen* occurs in English writers only as an echo of Spenser (N.E.D.).

[2] *Vide* "The Dialect of Robert Burns," by Sir James Wilson (Oxford Press, 1923), and for happy instances of beautiful words still lingering on in the Scots dialects, *vide* especially "The Roxburghshire Word-Book," by George Watson (Cambridge, 1923).

their bearing on the present question. Reduced to their simplest terms, the manifestoes, while passing judgment on the conventional poetical diction, conceded to the poet the right of a style in keeping with his subject and inspiration, and Wordsworth's successors for the most part, so far as style in the narrower sense of *vocabulary* is concerned, did not fail to reap the benefits of the emancipation won for them. And among the varied sources upon which they began to draw for fresh reserves of diction were the abundant stores of old words, full of colour and energy, to be gleaned from the pages of their great predecessors.

CHAPTER VI

COMPOUND EPITHETS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

IT is proposed in this chapter to examine in some detail the use of compound epithets in the poetry of the eighteenth century. For this purpose the following grammatical scheme of classification has been adopted from various sources:[1] *First Type*, noun *plus* noun; *Second Type*, noun *plus* adjective; *Third Type*, noun *plus* present participle; *Fourth Type*, noun *plus* past participle; *Fifth Type*, adjective, or adjective used adverbially, *plus* another part of speech, usually a participle; *Sixth Type*, true adverb *plus* a participle; *Seventh Type*, adjective *plus* noun plus *-ed*. Of these types it will be evident in many cases that the first (noun *plus* noun) and the sixth (true adverb *plus* participle) are not compounds at all, for the hyphen could often be removed without any change or loss of meaning. Occasionally the compounds will be regarded from the point of view of the logical relation between the two elements, when a formal classification may usually be made as follows: (*a*) *Attributive*, as in "anger-glow"; (*b*) *Objective*, as in "anger-kindling"; (*c*) *Instrumental*, as in "anger-boiling." This scheme of classification permits of an examination of the compounds from the formal point

[1] Sweet, "New English Grammar" (1892), Part II, pp. 208–212, and Skeat, "Principles of English Etymology" (1887), Part I, pp. 418–420.

of view, whilst at the same time it does not preclude an estimate of the æsthetic value of the new words thus added to the language of poetry.[1]

It may be said, to begin with, that the formation and use of compound epithets has always been one of the distinguishing marks of the special language of poetry in English, as distinct from that of prose. The very ease with which they can be formed out of the almost inexhaustible resources of the English vocabulary has been a constant source of temptation to poets with new things to say, or new impressions to describe. Moreover, the partial disappearance of inflections in modern English has permitted of a vagueness in the formation of compound words, which in itself is of value to the word-maker. Though, of course, it is possible in most cases accurately to analyse the logical relation between the elements of a compound, yet it sometimes happens, especially with the compound epithets of poetry, that this cannot be done with certainty, because the new formation may have been the result of a hasty but happy inspiration, with no regard to the regular rules of composition.[2] Hence, from one point of view, the free formation of compounds is a legitimate device allowed to the poets, of which the more severe atmosphere of prose is expected to take less advantage; from another point of view, the greater prevalence of the compound in poetry may not be unconnected with the rhythm of verse. Viewed in this light, the use of compound

[1] The first literary appearance of each compound has been checked as far as possible by reference to the "New English Dictionary." It is hardly necessary to say that the fact of a compound being assigned, as regards its first appearance, to any individual writer, is not in itself evidence that he himself invented the new formation, or even introduced it into literature. But in many cases, either from the nature of the compound itself, or from some other internal or external evidence, the assumption may be made.

[2] Cp. Sweet, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

epithets in our poetry at any period may well have been conditioned, in part at least, by the metrical form in which that poetry received expression; and thus in the poetry of the eighteenth century it connects itself in some degree—first, with the supremacy of the heroic couplet, and later with the blank verse that proved to be the chief rival of the decasyllabic.

The freedom of construction which facilitates the formation of compounds had already in the earliest English period contributed to that special poetic diction which is a distinguishing mark of Anglo-Saxon verse, as indeed of all the old Germanic poetry; of the large number of words not used in Anglo-Saxon prose, very many are synonymous compounds meaning the same thing.[1] During the Middle English period, and especially before the triumph of the East Midland dialect definitely prepared the way for Modern English, it would seem that the language lost much of its old power of forming compounds, one explanation being that the large number of French words, which then came into the language, drove out many of the Old English compounds, whilst at the same time these in-comers, so easily acquired, tended to discourage the formation of new compounds.[2] It was not until the great outburst of literary activity in the second half of the sixteenth century that a fresh impetus was given to the formation of compound nouns and epithets. The large number of classical translations especially exercised an important influence in this respect: each new translation had its quota of fresh compounds, but Chapman's "Homer" may

[1] In the "Beowulf" there are twenty-three compounds meaning "Ocean," twelve meaning "Ship," and eighteen meaning "Sword" (*vide* Emerson, "Outline History of the English Language," 1906, p. 121).

[2] Cp. Champney's "History of English" (1893), p. 192 and Note; and Lounsbury, "History of the English Language" (1909), p. 109.

be mentioned as especially noteworthy.[1] At the same time the plastic state of Elizabethan English led to the making of expressive new compounds of native growth, and from this period date some of the happiest compound epithets to be found in the language.[2] From the Elizabethans this gift of forming imaginative compounds was inherited, with even greater felicity by Milton, many of whose epithets, especially those of Type VII such as "*grey-hooded* even," "*coral-paven floor*," "*flowery-kirtled* Naiades" reveal him as a consummate master of word-craft.

With Dryden begins the period with which we are especially concerned, for it is generally agreed that from nearly every point of view the advent of what is called eighteenth century literature dates from the Restoration. During the forty years dominated by Dryden in practically every department of literature, the changes in the language, both of prose and poetry, which had been slowly evolving themselves, became apparent, and, as the sequel will show, this new ideal of style, with its passion for "correctness," and its impatience of innovation, was not one likely to encourage or inspire the formation of expressive compounds; the happy audacities of the Elizabethans, of whose tribe it is customary to seal Milton, are no longer possible.

The compounds in the poems of Dryden show this; of his examples of Type I—the substantive compounds—the majority are merely the juxtaposition of two appositional nouns, as *brother-angels* ("Killigrew," 4); or, more rarely, where the first element has a descriptive or adjectival force, as *traitor-friend*

[1] Cp. Sidney's remarks in the "Defence of Poesie—Elizabethan Critical Essays," ed. Smith, Vol. I, p. 204.

[2] E.g. Spenser's "*sea-shouldering* whales" (an epithet that especially pleased Keats), Nashe's "*sky-bred* chirpers," Marlowe's "*gold-fingered* Ind," Shakespeare's "*fancy-free*," "*forest-born*," "*cloud-capt*," etc.

(" Palamon," II, 568). Not much more imaginative power is reflected in Dryden's compound epithets; his instances of Types III and IV include " *cloud-dispelling* winds " (" Ovid," Met. I, 356), " *sun-begotten* tribe " (*ibid*, III, 462), with more original examples like " *sleep-procuring* wand." Next comes a large number of instances of Types V and VI: " *thick-spread* forest " (" Palamon," II, 123), " *hoarse-resounding* shore " (" Iliad " I, 54), as well as many compounded with *long-*, *well-*, *high-*, etc. Most of these examples of Types V and VI are scarcely compounds at all, for after such elements as " long," " well," " much," the hyphen could in most cases be omitted without any loss of power. Of Dryden's compound epithets it may be said in general that they reflect admirably his poetic theory and practice; they are never the product of a " fine frenzy." At the same time not a few of them seem to have something of that genius for satirical expression with which he was amply endowed. Compounds like *court-informer* (" Absalom," 719), " the rebels' *pension-purse* " (*ibid.*, Pt. II, 321),

> Og, from a *treason-tavern* rolling home
> (*Ibid.*, 480)

play their part in the delivery of those " smacks in the face " of which Professor Saintsbury speaks in his discussion of Dryden's satiric manipulation of the heroic couplet.[1]

In the verse of Pope, compound formations are to be found in large numbers. This may partly be attributed, no doubt, to the amount of translation included in it, but even in his original poetry there are many more instances than in the work of his great predecessor. When engaged on his translation of Homer

[1] Dryden, " English Men of Letters " (1906), p. 76.

the prevalence of compounds naturally attracted his attention, and he refers to the matter more than once in his Preface.[1] As might be expected from the apostle of "correctness," he lays down cautious and conservative "rules" of procedure. Such should be retained "as slide easily of themselves into an English compound, without violence to the ear, or to the received rules of composition, as well as those which have received the sanction from the authority of our best poets, and are become familiar through their use of them."[2]

An examination of Pope's compounds in the light of "the received rules of composition," shows his examples to be of the usual types. Of noun *plus* noun combinations he has such forms as "*monarch-savage*" ("Odyss." IV), whilst he is credited with the first use of "the *fury-passions*" (Epistle III). More originality and imagination is reflected in his compound epithets; of those formed from a noun and a present participle, with the first element usually in an objective relation to the second, his instances include "*love-darting*-eyes" ("Unfortunate Lady"), as well as others found before his time, like the Elizabethan "*heart-piercing* anguish" (*ibid.*, XII) and "*laughter-loving* dame" (*ibid.*, III). He has large numbers of compounded nouns and past-participles, many of which—"*moss-grown* domes" ("Eloisa"), "*cloud-topped* hills" ("Essay on Man," I, 100), "*Sea-girt* isles" ("Iliad," III) —were common in the seventeenth century, as well as "borrowed" examples, such as "*home-felt* joys" (Epistle II) or "*air-bred* people" ("Odyss.," LX, 330), presumably from Milton and Drayton respectively. But he has a few original formations of this type, such as "*heaven-*

[1] Pope's "Homer," ed. Buckley, Preface, p. xli.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 47; and cp. Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," ed. Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), Vol. I, p. 2, Footnote.

directed spire" (Epistle III), "*osier-fringed* bank," ("Odyss.," XIII), the latter perhaps a reminiscence of Sabrina's song in "Comus," as well as happier combinations, of which the best examples are "*love-born* confidence" ("Odyss.," X) and "*love-dittied* airs" ("Odyss.," II).

Pope, however, makes his largest use of that type of compound which can be formed with the greatest freedom—an adjective, or an adjective used adverbially, joined to a present or past participle. He has dozens of examples with the adverbial *long, wide, far, loud, deep, high*, etc., as the first element, most of the examples occurring in the Homer translations, and being attempts to reproduce the Greek compounds.[1] Other instances have a higher æsthetic value: "*fresh-blooming* hope" ("Eloisa"), "*silver-quivering* rills" (Epistle IV), "*soft-trickling* waters" ("Iliad," IX), "sweet airs *soft-circling*" (*ibid.*, XVII), etc. Of the formations beginning with a true adverb, the most numerous are the quasi-compounds beginning with "*ever*"—"*ever-during* nights," "*ever-fragrant* bowers" ("Odyss.," XII), etc.; or "*well*"—"*well-sung* woes" ("Eloisa") or "yet"—"*yet-untasted* food" ("Iliad," XV), etc. These instances do not reveal any great originality, for the very ease with which they can be formed naturally discounts largely their poetic value. Occasionally, however, Pope has been more successful; perhaps his best examples of this type are "*inly-pining* hate" "Odyss., VI—where the condensation involved in the epithet does at least convey some impression of power—and "the *softly-stealing* space of time" ("Odyss.," XV), where the compound almost produces a happy effect of personification.

[1] Here it may be noted that many of Pope's compounds in his "Homer" have no warrant in the original; they are in most cases supplied by Pope himself, to "pad out" his verses, or, more rarely, as paraphrases of Greek words or phrases.

Of the irregular type of compound, already mentioned in connexion with Dryden, Pope has a few instances—" *white-robed* innocence " (" Eloisa "), etc. But perhaps Pope's happiest effort in this respect is to be seen in that quatrain from the fourth book of the " Dunciad," containing three instances of compound epithets, which help to remind us that at times he had at his command a diction of higher suggestive and evocative power than the plain idiom of his satiric and didactic verse :

> To isles of fragrance, *lily-silver'd* vales
> Diffusing languor in the panting gales ;
> To lands of singing or of dancing slaves
> *Love-whisp'ring* woods and *lute-resounding* waves.

Of the poets contemporary with Pope only brief mention need be made from our present point of view. The poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea contain few instances and those of the ordinary type, a remark which is equally applicable to the poems of Parnell and John Phillips. John Gay (1685–1732), however, though he has many formations found in previous writers, has also some apparently original compound epithets which have a certain charm : " *health-breathing* breezes " (" A Devonshire Hill," 10), " *dew-besprinkled* lawn " (" Fables," 50), and " the lark *high-poised* in the air " (" Sweet William's Farewell," 13). More noteworthy is John Dyer ; " Grongar Hill " has no very striking examples, but his blank verse poems have one or two not devoid of imaginative value : " *soft-whispering* waters " (" Ruins of Rome ") and " *plaintive-echoing* ruins " (*ibid*) ; he has been able to dispense with the " classical " descriptive terms for hills and mountains (" shaggy," " horrid," " terrible," etc.), and his new epithets reflect something at least of that changing attitude towards natural scenery, of which he was a foremost pioneer :

" *slow-climbing* wilds " (" Fleece," I), " *cloud-dividing* hill " (*ibid.*), and his irregular " *snow-nodding* crags " (*ibid.*, IV).

Neglecting for the moment the more famous of the blank verse poems, we may notice Robert Blair's " Grave " (published 1743), with a few examples, which mainly allow him to indulge in " classical " periphrases, such as the " *sight-invigorating* tube " for " a telescope." David Mallet, who imitated his greater countryman James Thomson, has one or two noteworthy instances: " pines *high-plumed* " (" Amyntor," II), " *sweetly-pensive* silence " (" Fragment "), " spring's *flower-embroidered* mantle " (" Excursion," I)—suggested, no doubt, by Milton's " violet-embroidered "—" the morn *sun-tinctured* " (*ibid.*), compound epithets which betray the influence of the " Seasons." Of the other minor blank verse poems their only aspect noteworthy from our present point of view is their comparative freedom from compounds of any description. John Armstrong's " Art of Preserving Health " (1744) has only a few commonplace examples, and the same may be said of the earlier " The Chase " (1735) by William Somerville, though he finds a new epithet in his expression " the strand *sea-lav'd* " (Bk. III, 431). James Grainger's " The Sugar Cane " (1764) shows a similar poverty, but the " *green-stol'd* Naiad, of the tinkling rill " (Canto I), " *soft-stealing* dews " (Canto III), " *wild-careering* clouds " (Canto II), and " *cane-crowned* vale " (Canto IV) are not without merit. These blank verse poems, avowedly modelled on Milton, might have been expected to attempt the " grandeur " of their original by high-sounding compounds; but it was rather by means of latinized words and constructions that the Miltonic imitators sought to emulate the grand style; and moreover, as Coleridge pointed out, Milton's great epics are almost free from

compound epithets, it being in the early poems that "a superfluity" is to be found.[1]

Before turning to the more famous blank verse poems of the first half of the eighteenth century it will be convenient at this point to notice one or two poets whose work represents, on its formal side at least, a continuation or development of the school of Pope. The first of these is Richard Savage, whose only poem of any real merit, "The Wanderer" (apart perhaps from "The Bastard"), appeared in 1729. He has only one or two new compounds of noun and part-participle, such as "the robe *snow-wrought*" ("The Wanderer," I, 55), his favourite combination being that of an adjective or adverb with a participle, where, amidst numerous examples of obvious formations, he occasionally strikes out something new: "eyes *dim-gleaming*" (Canto I), "*soft-creeping* murmurs" (Canto V), etc. Of his other types the only other noteworthy compound is the "past-participle" epithet in his phrase "the *amber-hued* cascade" (Canto III), though a refreshing simplicity of expression is found in such lines as

> The bull-finch whistles soft his *flute-like* note.

The poetical work of Dr. Johnson contains scarcely any instances of compounds, and none either newly invented or applied. "London" and "The Vanity of Human Wishes" have each not more than two or three instances, and even the four poems, in which he successively treats of the seasons, are almost destitute of compound epithets, "*snow-topped* cot" ("Winter") being almost the only example.

There are many more instances of compound formations in the works of Oliver Goldsmith, most of which, like "*nut-brown* draughts" ("Deserted Village," II),

[1] Shawcross, *op. cit.*, p. 2, Footnote.

"*sea-borne* gales" ("Traveller," 121), "*grass-grown* footway" ("Deserted Village," 127), had either been long in the language, or had been used by earlier eighteenth century poets. There are, however, instances which testify to a desire to add to the descriptive power of the vocabulary; in "The Traveller" we find mention of "the *hollow-sounding* bittern" (l. 44), "the *rocky-crested* summits" (l. 85), "the *yellow-blossomed* vale" (l. 293), and the "*willow-tufted* bank" (l. 294). For the rest, Goldsmith's original compounds are, like so many of this type, mere efforts at verbal condensation, as "*shelter-seeking* peasant" ("Traveller," 162), "*joy-pronouncing* eye" (*ibid.*, 10), etc.

Of the more famous blank verse poems of the eighteenth century the first and most important was "The Seasons" of James Thomson, which appeared in their original form between 1726 and 1730. The originality of style, for which Johnson praised him,[1] is perhaps to be seen especially in his use of compound formations; probably no other poet has ever used them so freely.

As a general rule, Thomson's compounds fall into the well-defined groups already mentioned. He has a number of noun *plus* noun formations (Type I), where the first element has usually a purely adjectival value; "*patriot-council*" ("Autumn," 98), "*harvest-treasures*" (*ibid.*, 1217), as well as a few which allow him to indulge in grandiose periphrasis, as in the "*monarch-swain*" ("Summer," 495) for a shepherd with his "*sceptre-crook*" (*ibid*, 497). These are all commonplace formations, but much more originality is found in his compound epithets. He frequently uses the noun *plus* present participle combinations (Type III), "*secret-winding, flower-enwoven* bowers" ("Spring," 1058) or "*forest-rustling* mountains"

[1] "Lives" ed. Hill, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 298.

("Winter," 151), etc. Moreover, the majority of his compounds are original, though now and then he has taken a "classical" compound and given it a somewhat curious application, as in "*cloud-compelling* cliffs" ("Autumn," 801). A few of this class are difficult to justify logically, striking examples being "*world-rejoicing* state" ("Summer," 116) for "the state of one in whom the world rejoices," and "*life-sufficing* trees" (*ibid*, 836) for "trees that give sustenance."

Thomson has also numerous instances of the juxtaposition of nouns and past-participles (Type IV): "*love-enlivened* cheeks" ("Spring," 1080), "*leaf-strewn* walks" ("Autumn," 955), "*frost-concocted* glebe" ("Winter," 706); others of this type are somewhat obscure in meaning, as "*mind-illumined* face" ("Spring," 1042), and especially "*art imagination-flushed*" ("Autumn," 140), where economy of expression is perhaps carried to its very limit.

Thomson's favourite method of forming compounds however is that of Type V, each book of "The Seasons" containing large numbers, the first element (*full, prone, quick*, etc.) often repeated with a variant second element. Sometimes constant repetition in this way produces the impression of a tiresome mannerism. Thus "many" joined to present and past-participles is used irregularly with quasi-adverbial force, apparently meaning "in many ways," "many times," or even "much," as "*many-twinkling* leaves" ("Spring," 158), "*many-bleating* flock" (*ibid.*, 835), etc. In the same way the word "mazy" seems to have had a fascination for Thomson. Thus he has "the *mazy-running* soul of melody" ("Spring," 577), "the *mazy-running* brook" ("Summer," 373), "and *mazy-running* clefts" ("Autumn," 816), etc. Not all of this type, however, are mere mechanical forma-

tions; some have real poetic value and bear witness to Thomson's undoubted gift for achieving happy expressive effects. Thus the "*close-embowering* wood" ("Autumn," 208), "the lonesome muse *low-whispering*" (*ibid.*, 955), "the *deep-tangled* copse" ("Spring," 594), "the *hollow-whispering* breeze" (*ibid.*, 919), "the *grey-grown* oaks" ("Summer," 225), "*flowery-tempting* paths" ("Spring," 1109), "the morn *faint-gleaming*" ("Summer," 48), "*dark-embowered* firs" ("Winter," 813), "the winds *hollow-blustering*" (*ibid.*, 988), "the *mossy-tinctured* streams" ("Spring," 380), as well as such passages as

> the long-forgotten strain
> At first *faint-warbled* ("Spring," 585)

and

> Ships *dim-discovered* dropping from the clouds.
> ("Summer," 946)

Thomson's compound epithets with a true adverb as the first element (Sixth Type), such as "*north-inflated* tempest" ("Autumn," 892), are not particularly striking, and some of them are awkward and result in giving a harsh effect to the verse, as

> goodness and wit
> In *seldom-meeting* harmony combined.
> ("Summer," 25–6)

Finally, in "The Seasons" there are to be found many examples of the type of compound epithet, already referred to, modelled on the form of a past-participle; here Thomson has achieved some of his happiest expressions, charged with real suggestive power.[1] Among his instances are such little "word-pictures" as "*rocky-channelled* maze" ("Spring," 401), "the *light-footed* dews" ("Summer," 123);

[1] *Vide* Léon Morel, *op. cit.*, Ch. IV, pp. 412 foll., for a detailed examination of Thomson's compound formations.

" the *keen-aired* mountain " (" Autumn," 434), " the *dusky-mantled* lawn " (*ibid.*, 1088), " the *dewy-skirted* clouds " (*ibid.*, 961). Even when he borrows a felicitous epithet he is able to apply it without loss of power, as when he gives a new setting to Milton's " meek-eyed " applied to " Peace " as an epithet for the quiet in-coming of the dawn : the " *meek-eyed* Morn " (" Summer," 47).

Thomson makes good and abundant use of compound epithets, and in this respect, as in others he was undoubtedly a bold pioneer. His language itself, from our present point of view, apart from the thought and outlook on external nature it reflects, entitles him to that honourable position as a forerunner in the Romantic reaction with which he is usually credited. He was not content to accept the stereotyped diction of his day, and asserted the right of the poet to make a vocabulary for himself. There is thus justice in the plea that it is Thomson, rather than Gray, whom Wordsworth should have marked down for widening the breach between the language of poetry and that of prose.

No doubt the prevalence of the compound epithets in " The Seasons " is due, to some extent at least, to the requirement of his blank verse line ; they helped him, so to speak, to secure the maximum of effect with the minimum of word-power ; and at times we can almost see him trying to give to his unrhymed decasyllabics something of the conciseness and polish to which Pope's couplet had accustomed his generation. But they owe their appearance, of course, to other causes than the mere mechanism of verse. Thompson's fondness for " swelling sound and phrase " has often been touched upon, and this predilection finds full scope in the compound epithets ; they play their part in giving colour and atmosphere to " The Seasons," and they announce unmis-

takably that the old dead, descriptive diction is doomed.

Of the blank verse poems of the period only "The Seasons" has any real claim to be regarded as announcing the Romantic revolt that was soon to declare itself unmistakably. But three years after the appearance of Thomson's final revision of his poem the first odes of William Collins were published, at the same time as those of Joseph Warton, whilst the work of Thomas Gray had already begun.

There are some two score of compound formations in the poems of Collins, but many of these—as "*love-darting*" ("Poetic Character," 8), "*soul-subduing*" ("Liberty," 92)—date from the seventeenth century. One felicitous compound Collins has borrowed from James Thomson, but in doing so he has invested it with a new and beautiful suggestiveness. Thomson had written of

> Ships *dim-discovered* dropping from the clouds.
> ("Summer," 946)

The compound is taken by Collins and given a new beauty in his description of the landscape as the evening shadows gently settle upon it:

> Hamlets brown and *dim-discovered* spires
> ("Evening," 37)

where the poetic and pictorial force of the epithet is perhaps at its maximum.[1]

Collins, however, has not contented himself with compounds already in the language; he has formed himself, apparently, almost half of the examples to be found in his poems. His instances of Types I,

[1] It would appear that this epithet had particularly caught the fancy of Collins. He uses it also in the "Ode on the Manners," this time figuratively, when he writes of "*dim-discovered* tracts of mind."

as of Types V and VI, are commonplace, and he has but few examples of Type II, the most noteworthy being "*scene-full* world" ("Manners," 78), where the epithet, irregularly formed, seems to have the meaning of "abounding in scenery." Most of his instances of Type III are either to be found in previous writers, or are obvious formations like "*war-denouncing* trumpets" ("Passions," 43).

Much more originality is evident in his examples of Type IV, which is apparently a favourite method with him. He has "*moss-crowned* fountain" ("Oriental Ecl., II, 24), "*sky-worn* robes" ("Pity," II), "*sedge-crowned* sisters" ("Ode on Thomson," 30), "*elf-shot* arrows" ("Popular Superstitions," 27), etc. Some instances here are, strictly speaking, irregular formations, for the participles, as in "*sphere-descended*," are from intransitive verbs; in other instances the logical relation must be expressed by a preposition such, as "*with*" in "*moss-crowned*," "*sedge-crowned*"; or "*by*" in "*fancy-blest*," "*elf-shot*"; or "*in*" in "*sphere-found*," "*sky-worn*." He has some half-dozen examples of Type VII, three at least of which—"*gay-motleyed* pinks" ("Oriental Eclogues," III, 17), "*chaste-eyed* Queen" ("Passions," 75), and "*fiery-tressed* Dane" ("Liberty," 97)—are apparently his own coinage, whilst others, such as "*rosy-lipp'd* health" ("Evening," 50) and "*young-eyed* wit," have been happily used in the service of the personifications that play so great a part in his Odes.

There is some evidence that the use of compounds by certain writers was already being noticed in the eighteenth century as something of an innovation in poetical language. Thus Goldsmith, it would seem, was under the impression that their increasing employment, even by Gray, was connected in some way with the revived study of the older poets, especially

Spenser.[1] This supposition is unfounded. Gray, it is true, uses a large number of compounds, found in previous writers, but it is chiefly from Milton—e.g. "*solemn-breathing* airs" ("Progress of Poesy," 14; cp. "Comus," 555), "rosy-bosomed hours" ("Spring," I), or from Pope—e.g. "*cloud-topped* head" ("Bard," 34) that he borrows. Moreover, he has many compounds which presumably he made for himself. Of Type I he has such instances as "the *seraph-wings* of Ecstasy" ("Progress," 96), "the *sapphire-blaze*" (ibid., 99), etc.; he has one original example of Type II in his "*silver-bright* Cynthia" ("Music," 32), and two of Type III, when he speaks of the valley of Thames as a "*silver-winding* way" ("Eton Ode," 10), and he finds a new epithet for the dawn in his beautiful phrase "the *incense-breathing* Morn" (Elegy XVII). Of Type IV, he has some half-dozen examples, only two of which, however, owe their first appearance to him—the irregularly formed "*feather-cinctured* chiefs" ("Progress," 62) and "the *dew-bespangled* wing" ("Vicissitude," 2). The largest number of Gray's compound epithets belong to Type V, where an adjective is used adverbially with a participle: "*rosy-crowned* loves" ("Progress," 28) and "*deep-toned* shell" ("Music," 23). One of Gray's examples of this class of compound, evidently formed on a model furnished by Thomson, came in for a good deal of censure. He speaks of "*many-twinkling* feet" ("Progress," 35), and the compound, which indeed is

[1] "Works," *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 203. In point of fact, there is little or no evidence in favour of it. Even the Spenserian imitations that flourished exceedingly at this time have little interest in this respect. Shenstone has very few instances of compounds, but the poems of William Thompson furnish a few examples: "*honey-trickling* streams" ("Sickness," Bk. I), "*Lily-mantled* meads" (*ibid.*), etc. Gilbert West's Spenserian poems have no instances of any special merit; but a verse of his Pindar shows that he was not without a gift for happy composition: "The *billow-beaten* side of the *foam-besilvered* main."

somewhat difficult to defend, aroused disapproval in certain quarters. Lyttleton was one of the first to object to its use, and he communicated his disapproval to Walpole, who, however, at once took sides for the defence. "In answer to your objection," he wrote,[1] "I will quote authority to which you will yield. As Greek as the expression is, it struck Mrs. Garrick; and she says that Mr. Gray is the only poet who ever understood dancing." Later, the objection was revived in a general form by Dr. Johnson. "Gray," he says,[2] "is too fond of words arbitrarily compounded. 'Many-twinkling' was formerly censured as not analogical: we may say '*many-spotted*' but scarcely '*many*-spotting.'" The incident is not without its significance; from the strictly grammatical point of view the epithet is altogether irregular, unless the first element is admitted to be an adverb meaning "very much" or "many times." But Gray's fastidiousness of expression is a commonplace of criticism, and we may be sure that even when he uses compounds of this kind he has not forgotten his own clearly expressed views on the language fit and proper for poetry.

Johnson also objected to another device by which Gray had sought to enrich the vocabulary of poetry, as reflected in his use of the "participal" epithet in *-ed*.[3] If this device for forming new epithets cannot be grammatically justified, the practice of the best English poets at least has always been against Johnson's dictum, and, as we have seen, it has been a prolific source of original and valuable compound epithets. Of this type Gray has some six or seven examples, the majority of which, however, had long been in the language, though in the new epithet of "the *ivy-mantled* tower" (Elegy IX) we may perhaps

[1] "Letters," Vol. III, p. 97.
[2] Hill, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 437.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 484.

see an indication of the increasing Romantic sensibility towards old ruins.

Though not admitted to the same high rank of poets as Collins and Gray, two of their contemporaries, the brothers Warton, are at least of as great importance in the history of the Romantic revival.[1] From our present point of view it is not too fanciful to see a reflection of this fact in the compound epithets freely used by both of the Wartons. Thomas Warton is especially noteworthy; probably no other eighteenth century poet, with the exception of James Thomson, has so many instances of new compound formations, and these are all the more striking in that few of them are of the mechanical type, readily formed by means of a commonplace adjective or adverb. Instances of compound substantives (Type I) are almost entirely lacking, and the same may be said of the noun *plus* adjective epithets (Type II). There are, however, a few examples of Type III (noun *plus* present participle), some of which, as "*beauty-blooming* isle" ("Pleasures of Melancholy"), "*twilight-loving* bat" (*ibid.*), and "the woodbines *elm-encircling* spray" ("On a New Plantation"), no doubt owe something to the influence of Thomson. Instances of Type IV are plentiful, and here again there is a welcome freshness in Warton's epithets: "Fancy's *fairy-circled* shrine" ("Monody Written near Stratford-on-Avon"), "morning's *twilight-tinctured* beam" ("The Hamlet"), "*daisy-dappled* dale" ("Sonnet on Bathing"). One instance of this class of compound epithet, "the *furze-clad* dale," is certainly significant as indicative of the changes that were going on from the "classical" to the Romantic outlook towards natural scenery.[2]

[1] *Vide* Edmund Gosse, "Two Pioneers of Romanticism" (Warton Lecture), 1915.

[2] It is a coincidence to find that the N.E.D. assigns the first use of the compound *furze-clad* to Wordsworth.

Of the other class of compound epithets, Warton has only a few instances, but his odes gave plenty of scope for the use of the "participial epithet" (Type VII), and he has formed them freely: "Pale Cynthia's *silver-axled* car" ("Pleasures of Melancholy"), "the *coral-cinctured* stole" ("Complaint of Cherwell"), "Sport, the *yellow-tressed* boy" (*ibid*). No doubt many of Thomas Warton's compound formations were the result of a conscious effort to find "high-sounding" terms, and they have sometimes an air of being merely rhetorical, as in such instances as "*beauty-blooming*," "*gladsome-glistering* green," "*azure-arched*," "*twilight-tinctured*," "*coral-cinctured*," "*cliff-encircled*," "*daisy-dappled*," where alliterative effects have obviously been sought. Yet he deserves great credit for his attempts to find new words at a time when the stock epithets and phrases were still the common treasury of the majority of his contemporaries.

His brother, Joseph Warton, is less of a pioneer, but there is evident in his work also an effort to search out new epithets. His compounds include (Type II) "*marble-mimic* gods" ("The Enthusiast"); (Type III) "*courage-breathing* songs" ("Verses, 1750"), with many instances of Type IV, some commonplace, as "*merchant-crowded* towns" ("Ode to Health"), others more original, as "mirth and youth nodding *lily-crowned* heads" ("Ode to Fancy"), Joy, "the *rose-crowned, ever-smiling* boy" ("Ode Against Despair"), "the *beech-embowered* cottage" ("On The Spring"). Moreover, there are a number in "The Enthusiast," which reflect a genuine love of Nature ("*thousand-coloured* tulips," "*pine-topp'd* precipice") and a keen observation of its sights and sounds.

It is not forcing the evidence of language too much to say that a similar increasing interest in external

nature finds expression in some of the compound epithets to be found in much of the minor poetry of the period. Thus Moses Mendez (*d.* 1758)[1] has in his poem on the various seasons (1751) such conventional epithets as

> On every hill the *purple-blushing* vine,

but others testify to first hand observation as

> The *pool-sprung* gnat on sounding wings doth pass.

Richard Jago (1715–1781)[2], in his "Edgehill" (1767), has such instances as "the *woodland-shade*," "the *wave-worn* face," and "the tillag'd plain *wide-waving*." The Rev. R. Potter,[3] who imitated Spenser in his "Farewell Hymn to the Country" (1749), has happy examples like "*mavis-haunted* grove" and "this *flowre-perfumed* aire." In William Whitehead's poems[4] there are numerous formations like "*cloud-enveloped* towers" ("A Hymn") and "*rock-invested* shades" ("Elegy," IV). A few new descriptive terms appear in the work of John Langhorne (1735–1779),[5] "*flower-feeding* rills" ("Visions of Fancy," I), "*long-winding* vales" ("Genius and Valour"), etc. Michael Bruce (1746–1767) in his "Lochleven"[6] has, e.g., "*cowslip-covered* banks," and fresh observation of bird life is seen in such phrases as "*wild-shrieking* gull" and "*slow-wing'd* crane." James Graeme (1749–1772)[7] has at least one new and happy compound in his line

> The *blue-gray* mist that hovers o'er the hill.
> ("Elegy written in Spring")

[1] Bell's "Fugitive Poets" (London, 1789), Vol. VI.
[2] Anderson's "British Poets," Vol. XI.
[3] Bell, *op. cit.*
[4] Anderson, *op. cit.*
[5] "British Poets," Vol. X.
[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, Pt. I.
[7] *Ibid.*, Pt. II.

John Scott(1730–1783)[1] makes more use of compound formations than most of his minor contemporaries. He has many instances of Type IV (noun *plus* participle), including "*rivulet-water'd* glade" (Eclogue I), "*corn-clad* plain," "*elder-shaded* cot" ("Amwell"). His few instances of Type VI (e.g. "*wildly-warbled* strain," ("Ode" IV), and of Type VII (e.g. "*trefoil-purpled* field" ("Elegy," III); "*may-flower'd* hedges" ("Elegy," IV); and "*golden-clouded* sky," ("Ode," II), are also worthy of notice.

Meanwhile another aspect of the rising Romantic movement was revealing itself in the work of Chatterton. With the "antiquarianism" of the Rowley poems we are not here concerned, but the language of both the "original" work and of the "discovered" poems contains plenty of material relevant to our special topic. Chatterton, indeed, seems to have had a predilection for compound formations, though he has but few instances of compound substantives (e.g. "*coppice-valley*" ("Elegy") and instances of Type II (noun *plus* adjective) are also rare. The other types of epithets are, however, well represented: "*echo-giving* bells" ("To Miss Hoyland"), "*rapture-speaking* lyre" ("Song"), etc. (Type III), though it is perhaps in Type IV that Chatterton's word-forming power is best shown "*flower-bespangled* hills" ("Complaint"), "*rose-hedged* vale" ("Elegy at Stanton-Drew"), etc., where the first compound epithet is a new and suggestive descriptive term. His examples of Type V are also worth noting: "*verdant-vested* trees" ("Elegy," V), "*red-blushing* blossom" ("Song"), whilst one of the best of them is to be found in those lines, amongst the most beautiful written by Chatterton, which reflect something of the new charm that men were beginning to find in old historic churches and buildings:

[1] "British Poets," Vol. XI, Pt. II.

To view the cross-aisles and the arches fair
Through the half-hidden *silver-twinkling* glare
Of yon bright moon in foggy mantle dress'd.
(" Parliament of Sprites," Canto XXI)

The remaining examples of Chatterton's compound formations do not call for much attention, though " *gently-plaintive* rill " (" Elegy on Phillips ") and " *loudly-dinning* stream " (" Aella," 84) are new and fresh. Chatterton has much of the conventional poetical language and devices of his time throughout his work, and his compound epithets do not in the mass vary much from contemporary usage in this respect. But some of them at least are significant of the position which he occupies in the history of the Romantic revival.

The greatest figure in this revival, as it appears to us now, was William Blake, but from our present point of view he is almost negligible. It may safely be said that few poets of such high rank have made less use of compound formations: in his entire poetical work scarcely half a dozen instances are to be found. Yet the majority of these, such as " *angel-guarded bed* " (" A Dream," 2), " *mind-forg'd* manacles " (" London," 8), " Winter's *deep-founded* habitation " (" Winter," 3), " *softly-breathing* song " (" Song," 2 : " Poetical Sketches ") are a sufficiently striking tribute to his ability to form expressive compounds had he felt the need. But in the beautiful purity and simplicity of his diction, for which he has in our own time at least received adequate praise, there was no place for long compound formations, which, moreover, are more valuable and more appropriate for descriptive poetry, and likely to mar the pure singing note of the lyric.

It is curious to find a similar paucity of compound formations in the poems of George Crabbe, the whole number being well represented by such examples as

"*dew-press'd* vale" ("Epistle to a Friend," 48), "*violet-wing'd* Zephyrs" ("The Candidate," 268), and "*wind-perfuming* flowers" ("The Choice"). No doubt the narrative character of much of Crabbe's verse is the explanation of this comparative lack of compounds, but the descriptions of wild nature that form the background for many of "The Tales" might have been expected to result in new descriptive terms.

Two lesser poets of the time are more noteworthy as regards our especial topic. William Mickle (1735–1788), in his "Almada Hill" (1781) and his "May Day," as well as in his shorter poems, has new epithets for hills and heights, as in such phrases as "*thyme-clad* mountains" and "*fir-crown'd* hill" ("Sorcerers," 4). His Spenserian imitation "Syr Martyn," contains a few happy epithets:

> How bright emerging o'er yon *broom-clad* height
> The silver empress of the night appears
> (Canto II, 31)

and "*daisie-whitened* plain," "*crystal-streamed* Esk" are among his new formations in "Eskdale Braes."

James Beattie has a large number of compounds in his poems, and though many of these are mechanical formations, he has a few new "nature" epithets which are real additions to the vocabulary of poetical description, as "*sky-mixed* mountain" ("Ode to Peace," 38), the lake "*dim-gleaming*" ("Minstrel," 176), "the *wide-weltering* waves" (*ibid.*, 481), the wave "*loose-glimmering*" ("Judgment of Paris," 458). He has also a few instances of Type VII chiefly utilized, as often with compounds of this type, as personifying epithets: "the frolic moments *purple*-pinioned" ("Judgment of Paris," 465) and "*loose-robed* Quiet" ("Triumph of Melancholy," 64).

The "Pleasures of Memory" (1792) by Samuel

Rogers has one or two compound formations: "*moon-light-chequered* shade" (Part II). Hope's "*summer-visions*" (*ibid.*) and "the *fairy-haunts* of long-lost hours" (*ibid.*), have a trace at least of that suggestive power with which Keats and Shelley were soon to endow their epithets. Brief reference only need be made to the works of Erasmus Darwin, which have already been mentioned as the great example of eighteenth century stock diction used to the utmost possible extent. He has plenty of instances of compound epithets of every type, but his favourite formation appears to be that of a noun *plus* part-participle, as "*sun-illumined* fane" ("Botanic Garden," I, 157), "*wave-worn* channels" (*ibid.*, I, 362), and as seen in such lines as

> Her *shell-wrack* gardens and her *sea-fan* bowers.
> ("Economy of Vegetation," VI, 82)

Many of Darwin's compounds have a certain charm of their own; in the mass they contribute towards that dazzling splendour with which eighteenth century diction here blazed out before it finally disappeared.

Cowper, like Blake and Crabbe, is not especially distinguished for his compound epithets. Though he has a large number of such formations, very few of them are either new or striking, a remark which applies equally to his original work and his translations. Many instances of all the types are to be found in the "Homer," but scarcely one that calls for special mention, though here and there we come across good epithets well applied: "accents *ardour-winged*" (IV, 239) or "*silver-eddied* Peneus" (II, 294).

Before attempting to sum up the use of compound epithets in eighteenth century poetry, brief reference may be made to their use in the early work of the two poets who announced the definite advent of the new age. Wordsworth in his early poems has many

instances of compound words, most of which are either his own formations, or are rare before his time. The original and final drafts both of the "Evening Walk" and the "Descriptive Sketches" show some divergence in this respect, compounds found in the 1793 version being omitted later, whilst on the other new formations appear in the revised poems. Besides imitative instances such as "*cloud-piercing* pine trees" (D.S., 63), there are more original and beautiful compounds, such as the "*Lip-dewing* song and the *ringlet-tossing* dance" (*ibid*, 132), which does not appear until the final draft.

Examples of Type IV are "*holly-sprinkled* steeps" (E.W., 10), "The sylvan cabin's *lute-enlivened* gloom" (D.S., 134, final); and of Types V and VI, "*green-tinged* margin" (D.S., 122), "*clear-blue* sky" (D.S., 113), "*dim-lit* Alps" (D.S., 1793 only, 217), and "the *low-warbled* breath of twilight lute" (D.S., 1793, 749). Wordsworth's early poems, it has been noted, are almost an epitome of the various eighteenth century devices for producing what was thought to be a distinctively poetical style,[1] but he soon shakes off this bondage, and "Guilt and Sorrow," perhaps the first poem in which his simplicity and directness of expression are fully revealed, is practically without instances of compound epithets.

The critics, it would appear, had already marked down as a fault a "profusion of new coined double epithets"[2] in a "small volume of juvenile poems" published by Coleridge in 1794. In replying to, or rather commenting on, the charge, Coleridge makes an interesting digression on the use of such formations, defending them on "the authority of Milton and Shakespeare," and suggesting that compound epithets should only be admitted if they are already "denizens"

[1] *Vide* Legouis, *op. cit.* (English translation, 1897), pp. 133 foll.
[2] Shawcross, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 2, Note.

of the language, or if the new formation is a genuine compound, and not merely two words made one by virtue of the hyphen. "A Language," he adds, "which like the English is almost without cases, is indeed in its very genius unfitted for compounds. If a writer, every time a compounded word suggests itself to him, would seek for some other mode of expressing the same sense, the chances are always greatly in favour of his finding a better word." Though there is a good deal of sound sense in these remarks, we have only to recall the wealth of beautiful compound epithets with which Keats, to take only one example, was soon to enrich the language, to realize that English poetry would be very much the poorer if the rule Coleridge lays down had been strictly observed. It would perhaps be truer to say that the imaginative quality of the compound epithets coined by a poet is a good test of his advance in power of expression.[1]

As regards his own practice, Coleridge goes on to say[2] that he "pruned the double epithets with no sparing hand"; but the pruning was not very severe, judging from a comparison of the two volumes. Yet these early poems are not without examples of good compound epithets: "*zephyr-haunted* brink," ("Lines to a Beautiful Spring"), "*distant-tinkling* stream" ("Song of the Pixies," 16), "*sunny-tinctured* hue" (*ibid.*, 43), "*passion-warbled* strain," ("To the Rev. W. J. H."), etc.

When we review the use of compound epithets in the poetry of the eighteenth century we are bound to admit that in this, as in other aspects of the "purely poetical," the eighteenth century stands apart from other periods in our literary history. Most readers

[1] See, e.g., de Selincourt's remarks on Keats' compound epithets; "Poems" (1904), Appendix C, p. 581.

[2] "Biog. Lit.," *op. cit.*, and cp. "Poetical Works," ed. Dykes Campbell, Appendix K, p. 540.

could probably at will call to their mind half a dozen compound epithets of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan period, of Milton, or of more modern writers, such as Keats, that are, as it were, little poems in themselves, Shakespeare's "*young-eyed cherubim*," or Milton's "*grey-hooded even*," or Keats's "*soft-conched shell*." It is safe to say that few eighteenth century words or phrases of this nature have captured the imagination to a similar degree; Collins's "*dim-discovered spires*" is perhaps the only instance that comes readily to the mind.

There are, of course, as our study has shown, plenty of instances of good compound epithets, but in the typical eighteenth century poetry these are rarely the product of a genuine creative force that endows the phrase with imaginative life. Even the great forerunners of the Romantic revolt are not especially remarkable in this respect; one of the greatest of them, William Blake, gave scarcely a single new compound epithet to the language, and whilst this fact, of course, cannot be brought as a reproach against him, yet it is, in some respects at least, significant of the poetical atmosphere into which he was born. It has often been remarked that when Latin influence was in the ascendant the formation of new and striking compound epithets has been very rare in English poetry, whilst it has been always stimulated, as we know from the concrete examples of Chapman and Keats, by the influence of a revived Hellenism.

Another fact is worthy of attention. Many of the most beautiful compound epithets in the English language are nature phrases descriptive of outdoor sights and sounds. The arrested development, or the atrophy of the sense of the beauty of the external world, which is a characteristic of the neo-classical school, was an unconscious but effective bar to the

formation of new words and phrases descriptive of outdoor life. The neo-classical poet, with his eye fixed on the town and on life as lived there, felt no necessity for adding to the descriptive resources of his vocabulary, especially when there was to his hand a whole *gradus* of accepted and consecrated words and phrases. It is in the apostles of " the return to Nature " that we find, however inadequately, to begin with, a new diction that came into being because these poets had recovered the use of their eyes and could sense the beauty of the world around them.

And this fact leads to a further consideration of the use of compound epithets from the formal viewpoint of their technical value. It has already been suggested that their use may not be unconnected with the mechanism of verse, and the æsthetic poverty of eighteenth century poetry in this respect may therefore be not unjustly regarded as an outcome of the two great prevailing vehicles of expression. In the first place, there was the heroic couplet as brought to perfection by Pope. " The uniformity and maximum swiftness that marked his manipulation of the stopped couplet was achieved," says Saintsbury, " not only by means of a large proportion of monosyllabic final words, but also by an evident avoidance of long and heavy vocables in the interior of the lines themselves."[1] Moreover, perhaps the commonest device to secure the uniform smoothness of the line was that use of the " *gradus* epithet " which has earlier been treated ; these epithets were for the most part stock descriptive adjectives—*verdant*, *purling*, *fleecy*, *painted*, and the like—which were generally regarded by the versifiers as the only attendant diction of the couplet. If we compare a typical Pope verse such as

Let *vernal* airs through trembling osiers play

[1] " History of English Prosody " (1908), Vol. II, p. 449.

with the line already quoted,

Love-whisp'ring woods and lute-resounding waves

we may perhaps see that the free use of compound epithets was not compatible with the mechanism of the couplet as illustrated in the greater part of Pope's practice; they would tend to weaken the balanced antithesis, and thus spoil the swing of the line.

The most formidable rival of the heroic couplet in the eighteenth century was blank verse, the advent of which marked the beginning of the Romantic reaction in form. Here Thomson may be regarded as the chief representative, and it is significant that the large number of compound epithets in his work are terms of natural description, which, in addition to their being a reflex of the revived attitude to natural scenery, were probably more or less consciously used to compensate readers for the absence of "the rhyme-stroke and flash" they were accustomed to look for in the contemporary couplet. "He utilizes periodically," to quote Saintsbury again,[1] "the exacter nature-painting, which in general poetic history is his glory, by putting the distinctive words for colour and shape in notable places of the verse, so as to give it character and quality." These "distinctive words for colour and shape" were, with Thomson, for the most part, compound epithets; almost by the time of "Yardley Oak," and certainly by the time of "Tintern Abbey," blank verse had been fully restored to its kingdom, and no longer needed such aid.

[1] "History of English Prosody," *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 480; and cp. *ibid.*, p. 496.

CHAPTER VII

PERSONIFICATION AND ABSTRACTION IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

IN the Preface of 1798, when Wordsworth formulated his theories with regard to poetical language, the first "mechanical device of style" against which he directed his preliminary attack was the use of "personifications of abstract ideas."[1] Such personifications, he urged, do not make any natural or regular part of "the very language of men," and as he wished "to keep the reader in the company of flesh and blood," he had endeavoured "utterly to reject them." He was ready to admit that they were occasionally "prompted by passion," but his predecessors had come to regard them as a sort of family language, upon which they had every right to draw. In short, in Wordsworth's opinion, abstractions and personifications had become a conventional method of ornamenting verse, akin to the "vicious diction," from the tyranny of which he wished to emancipate poetry. The specific point on which he thus challenged the practice of his predecessors could hardly be gainsaid, for he had indicted a literary device, or artifice, which was not only worked to death by the mere poetasters of the period, but which disfigures not a little the work of even the great poets of the century.

[1] Prefaces, "Poetical Works," ed. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1916), p. 936.

The literary use of abstraction and personification was not, it is needless to say, the invention of the eighteenth century. It is as old as literature itself, which has always reflected a tendency to interpret or explain natural phenomena or man's relations with the invisible powers that direct or influence human conduct, by means of allegory. English poetry in the Middle Ages, especially that of Chaucer, Langland, and their immediate successors, fitly illustrates the great world of abstraction which had slowly come into being, a world peopled by personified states or qualities —the Seven Deadly Sins, the Virtues, Love, etc.— typifying or symbolizing the forces which help man, or beset and ensnare him as he makes his pilgrim's progress through this world.

Already the original motive power of allegory was considerably diminished, even if it had not altogether disappeared, and, by the time of the " Faerie Queene," the literary form which it had moulded for itself had become merely imitative and conventional, so that even the music and melody of Spenser's verse could not altogether vitalize the shadowy abstractions of his didactic allegory. With " Paradise Lost " we come to the last great work in which personified abstractions reflect to any real extent the original allegorical motive in which they had their origin. Milton achieves his supreme effects in personification in that his figures are merely suggestive, strongly imagined impressions rather than clean-cut figures. For nothing can be more dangerous, from the poetic point of view, than the precise figures which attempt to depict every possible point of similarity between the abstract notion and the material representation imagined.[1]

It is sometimes considered that the mania for

[1] *Vide* Courthope, " History of English Poetry " (1910), Vol. I, Chap. IX, for an account of mediaeval allegory and personification.

abstraction was due largely to the influence of the two poets who are claimed, or regarded, as the founders or leaders of the new classical school—Dryden and Pope. As a matter of fact, neither makes any great use of personification. Dryden has a few abstractions in his original works, such as,

> Far from her sight flew Faction, Strife and Pride
> And Envy did but look on
> (" First Epistle ")

but his examples are mainly to be found in his modernizations or translations, where of necessity he takes them from his originals.[1]

Pope makes a greater use of the figure, but even here there is no excess. There is not a single personification in the four pastorals of " The Seasons," a subject peculiarly adapted to such treatment. In " Eloisa to Abelard " there are two instances where some attempt at characterization is made.[2] More instances, though none very striking, are to be found in " Windsor Forest," but the poem ends with a massed group, forming a veritable catalogue of the personified vices which had done so much service in poetry since the days of the Seven Deadly Sins.

In other poems Pope uses the device for humorous or satiric effect, as in the " Pain," " Megrim," and " Ill nature like an ancient maid " (l. 24) of " The Rape of the Lock ; " or the " Science," " Will," " Logic," etc., of " The Dunciad," where all are invested with capital letters, but with little attempt to work up a definite picture, except, as was perhaps to be expected, in the case of " Dullness," which is provided with a bodyguard (Bk. I, 45–52).

[1] E.g. " Palamon," II, 480, 564, 565 ; Æneas XII, 505–506.

[2] " Black Melancholy " (ll. 163–168) and " Hope " (l. 278), the former of which especially pleased Joseph Warton (" Essay on Pope " : Works, Vol. I, p. 314).

Though, as we have already said, there is no great use of such figures in the works of Pope, they are present in such numbers in his satiric and didactic works as to indicate one great reason for their prevalence in his contemporaries and successors. After the Restoration, when English literature entered on a new era, the changed and changing conditions of English life and thought soon impressed themselves on poetry. The keynote to the understanding of much that is characteristic of this new "classical" literature has been well summed up in the formula that "the saving process of human thought was forced for generations to beggar the sense of beauty."[1] The result was an invasion of poetry by ideas, arguments, and abstractions which were regarded both as expressing admirably the new spirit of rationalism, as well as constituting in themselves dignified subjects and ornaments of poetry.

This is well illustrated in the case of several of Pope's contemporaries. In the works of Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) abstractions of the conventional type are plentiful, usually accompanied by a qualifying epithet: "Fortune fair-array'd" ("An Imitation"), "Impetuous Discord," "Blind Mischief," ("On Queen Anne's Peace"), "the soft Pathetic" ("On the Different Styles of Poetry"). These are only a few of the examples of the types favoured by Parnell, where only here and there are human traits added by means of qualifying epithets or phrases. In one or two instances, however, there are more detailed personifications. Thus, in the "Epistle to Dr. Swift," which abounds in shadowy abstractions, Eloquence is fully described for us:

> Upon her cheek sits Beauty ever young
> The soul of music warbles on her tongue.

[1] Elton, "The Augustan Ages" (1895), p. 209.

Moreover, already in Parnell it is evident that the influence of Milton is responsible for some of his personifications. In the same poem we get the invocation:

> Come! country Goddess come, nor thou suffice
> But bring thy mountain-sister Exercise,

figures which derive obviously from "L'Allegro."

In the case of Richard Savage (1696–1743) there is still greater freedom in the use of personified abstractions, which, as here the creative instinct is everywhere subjected to the didactic purpose, become very wearisome. The "Wanderer" contains long catalogues of them, in some instances pursued for over fifty lines.[1]

The device continued to be very popular throughout the eighteenth century, especially by those who continue or represent the "Ethical" school of Pope. First amongst these may be mentioned Edward Young (1681–1765), whose "Night Thoughts" was first published between 1742–1744. Young, like his contemporaries, has recourse to personifications, both for didactic purposes and apparently to add dignity to his style. It is probable, too, that in this respect he owes something to "Paradise Lost"; from Milton no doubt he borrowed his figure of Death, which, though poetically not very impressive, seems to have captured the imagination of Blake and other artists who have tried to depict it. The figure is at first only casually referred to in the Fourth Book (l. 96), where there is a brief and commonplace reference to "Death, that mighty hunter"; but it is not until the fifth book that the figure is developed. Yet, though the characterization is carried to great length, there is no very striking personification: we are given, instead, a

[1] Cf. "Suicide" (Canto II, 194–250).

long-drawn-out series of abstractions, with an attempt now and then to portray a definite human figure. Thus

> Like princes unconfessed in foreign courts
> Who travel under cover, Death assumes
> The name and look of life, and dwells among us.

And then the poet describes Death as being present always and everywhere, and especially

> Gaily carousing, to his gay compeers
> Inly he laughs to see them laugh at him
> As absent far.

But Young has not, like Milton, been able to conjure up a definite and convincing vision, and thus he never achieves anything approaching the overwhelming effect produced by the phantom of Death in " Paradise Lost," called before us in a single verse :

> So spake the grisly Terror.
> (P.L., II. 704)

For the rest, Young's personifications, considering the nature of his subject, are fewer than might be expected. Where they occur they often seem to owe their presence to a desire to vary the monotony of his moral reflections ; as a result we get a number of abstractions, which may be called personifications only because they are sometimes accompanied by human attributes.

Young has also certain other evocations which can scarcely be called abstractions, but which are really indistinct, shadowy beings, like the figures of a dream, as when he describes the phantom of the past :

> The spirit walks of every day deceased
> And smiles an angel, or a fury frowns
> (ll. 180–181)

or the grief of the poet as he ever meets the shades of joys gone for ever :

> The ghosts
> Of my departed joys : a numerous train.

Here the poet has come near to achieving that effect which in the hands of the greatest poets justifies the use of personification as a poetic figure. The more delicate process just illustrated is distinct both from the lifeless abstraction and the detailed personification, for in these cases there is a tinge of personal emotion which invests these shadowy figures with something of a true lyrical effect.

The tendency, illustrated in the " Night Thoughts," to make a purely didactic use of personification and abstraction is found to a much greater extent in Akenside's " Pleasures of the Imagination," first published in 1744, to be considerably enlarged in 1767. The nature of Akenside's subject freely admitted of the use of these devices, and he has not been slow to avail himself of them.

Large portions of the " Pleasures of the Imagination" resolve themselves into one long procession of abstract figures. Very often Akenside contents himself with the usual type of abstraction, accompanied by a conventional epithet : " Wisdom's form celestial " (I, 69), " sullen Pomp " (III, 216), etc., though sometimes by means of human attributes or characteristics we are given partial personifications such as :

> Power's purple robes nor Pleasure's
> flowery lap. (l. 216)

And occasionally there are traces of a little more imagination :

> thy lonely whispering voice
> O faithful Nature ! [1]

[1] Cf. also Bk. I, ll. 10, 11 ; 548, etc.

But on the whole it is clear that with Akenside abstraction and personification are used simply and solely for moral and didactic purposes, and not because of any perception of their potential artistic value. Incidentally, an interesting side-light on this point is revealed by one of the changes introduced by the poet into his revision of his chief work. In the original edition of 1740 there is an invocation to Harmony (Bk. I, ll. 20 foll.), with her companion,

> Majestic Truth ; and where Truth deigns to come
> Her sister Liberty will not be far.

Before the publication of the revised edition, Akenside, who at one time had espoused the cause of liberty with such ardour as to lead to his being suspected of republicanism, received a Court appointment. In the revised edition the concluding lines of the invocation became

> for with thee comes
> The guide, the guardian of their majestic rites
> Wise Order and where Order deigns to come
> Her sister Liberty will not be far.
>
> (138 foll.)

The same lavish use of abstractions is seen, not only in the philosophic poetry proper, but also in other works, which might perhaps have been expected to escape the contagion. Charles Churchill (1731–1764), if we set aside Johnson and Canning, may be regarded as representing eighteenth century satire in its decline, after the great figures of Pope and Swift have disappeared from the scene, and among the causes which prevent his verse from having but little of the fiery force and sting of the great masters of satire is that, instead of the strongly depicted, individual types of Pope, for example, we are given a heterogeneous collection of human virtues, vices, and

characteristics, most often in the form of mere abstractions, sometimes personified into stiff, mechanical figures.[1] Only once has Churchill attempted anything novel in the way of personification, and this in humorous vein, when he describes the social virtues:

> With belly round and full fat face,
> Which on the house reflected grace,
> Full of good fare and honest glee,
> The steward Hospitality.

Churchill had no doubt a genuine passion for poetry and independence, but the *saeva indignatio* of the professed censor of public morals and manners cannot be conveyed to the reader through the medium of mechanical abstractions which, compared with the flesh-and-blood creations of Dryden and Pope, show clearly that for the time being the great line of English satire has all but come to an end.

Eighteenth century ethical poetry was represented at this stage by Johnson and Goldsmith, at whose work it will now be convenient to glance. The universal truths which Johnson as a stern, unbending moralist wished to illustrate in "London" (1738) and "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (1749), might easily have resulted in a swarm of the abstractions and personifications fashionable at the time.[2] From this danger Johnson was saved by the depth of feeling with which he unfolds the individual examples chosen to enforce his moral lessons. Not that he escapes entirely; "London" has a few faint abstractions ("Malice," "Rapine," "Oppression"); but though

[1] Especially in Book III of "The Duellist," where the reader is baffled and wearied by the unending array of bloodless abstractions.

[2] It may be noted incidentally that, according to the "New English Dictionary," the term *personification* owes its first literary appearance to the famous "Dictionary" of 1755, where it is thus defined, and (appropriately enough) illustrated: "*Prosopopeia*, the change of things to persons, as 'Confusion heard his voice.'"

occasionally they are accompanied by epithets suggesting human attributes ("surly Virtue," "persecuting Fate," etc.), as a rule there is no attempt at definite personification, a remark which also applies to the "Vanity of Human Wishes." In his odes to the different seasons he has not given, however, any elaborate personifications, but has contented himself with slight human touches, such as

> Now Autumn bends a cloudy brow.

Of Johnson's poetical style, regarded from our present point of view, it may be said to be well represented in the famous line from "London":

> Slow rises Worth by Poverty depressed,

where there is probably no intention or desire to personify at all, but which is a result of that tendency towards Latin condensation which the great Doctor and his contemporaries had introduced into English prose.

Goldsmith's poetry has much in common with that of Johnson, in that both deal to some extent with what would now be called social problems. But it is significant of Goldsmith's historical position in eighteenth century poetry as representing a sort of "half-way attitude," in the matter of poetical style, between the classical conventional language and the free and unfettered diction advocated by Wordsworth, that there are few examples of personified abstractions in his works, and these confined mainly to one passage in "The Traveller":

> Hence Ostentation here with tawdry Art
> Pants for the vulgar praise which fools impart, etc.

At this point it is necessary to hark back for the purpose of considering other works which had been appearing alongside of the works just discussed. It has already been remarked that in this matter of the use of abstraction and personification the influence of Milton early asserted itself, and there can be no doubt that a good deal of it may be traced to the influence more especially of the early poems. Indeed, the blank verse poems, which attempted to imitate or parody the "grand style" of the great epics, furnish few examples of the personified abstraction. The first of these, the "Splendid Shilling" and "Cyder" of John Philips (1705–1706) contains but few instances. In Somerville's "Chase" there is occasionally a commonplace example, such as "brazen-fisted Time," though in his ode "To Marlborough" he falls into the conventional style quickly enough. In the rest of the blank verse poems Mallet's "Excursion" (1738), and his "Amyntor and Theodora" (1744), comparatively little use is made of the device, a remark also applicable to Dyer's "Ruins of Rome" (1740), and to Grainger's "Sugar Cane" (1764).

The fashion for all these blank verse poems had been started largely by the success of "The Seasons," which appeared in its original form from 1726 to 1730, to undergo more than one revision and augmentation until the final edition of 1744. Though Thomson's work shows very many traces of the influence of Milton, there is no direct external evidence that his adoption of blank verse was a result of that influence. Perhaps, as has been suggested,[1] he was weary of the monotony of the couplet, or at least considered its correct and polished form incapable of any further development. At the same time it is clear that having adopted "rhyme-unfettered verse," he chose to regard

[1] Phelps, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38.

Milton as a model of diction and style, though he was by no means a slavish imitator.

With regard to the special problems with which we are here concerned, it must be noted that when Thomson was first writing "The Seasons," the device of personified abstraction had not become quite so conventional and forced in its use as at a later date. Nevertheless examples of the typical abstraction are not infrequent; thus, in an enumeration of the passions which, since the end of the "first fresh dawn," have invaded the hearts and minds of men, we are given "Base Envy," withering at another's joy; "Convulsive Anger," storming at large; and "Desponding Fear," full of feeble fancies, etc. ("Spring," 280–306). Other examples are somewhat redeemed by the use of a felicitous compound epithet, "Art imagination-flushed" ("Autumn," 140), "the lonesome Muse, low-whispering" (*ibid.*, 955), etc. In "Summer" (ll. 1605 foll.) the poet presents one of the usual lists of abstract qualities ("White Peace, Social Love," etc.), but there are imaginative touches present that help to vitalize some at least of the company into living beings:

> The tender-looking Charity intent
> On gentle deeds, and shedding tears through smiles—

and the passage is thus a curious mixture of mechanical abstractions with more vivid and inspired conceptions.

Occasionally Thomson employs the figure with ironical or humorous intention, and sometimes not ineffectively, as in the couplet,

> Then sated Hunger bids his brother Thirst
> Produce the mighty bowl.
>
> ("Autumn," 512)

He is also fond of the apostrophic personification,

often feebly, as when, acting upon a suggestion from Mallet,[1] he writes:

> Comes, Inspiration, from thy hermit seat,
> By mortal seldom found, etc.
> ("Summer," l. 15)

As for the seasons themselves, we do not find any very successful attempts at personification. Thomson gives descriptive impressions rather than abstractions: "gentle Spring, ethereal mildness" ("Spring," 1), "various-blossomed Spring" ("Autumn," 5); or borrowing, as often, an epithet from Milton, "refulgent Summer" ("Summer," 2); or "surly Winter" ("Spring," 11).

But in these, and similar passages, the seasons can hardly be said to be distinctly pictured or personified. In "Winter," however, there is perhaps a more successful attempt at vague but suggestive personification:[2]

> See Winter comes, to rule the varied year,
> Sullen and sad, with all his rising train
> Vapours, and clouds and storms.

But on the whole Thomson's personifications of the seasons are not, poetically, very impresssive. There is little or no approach to the triumphant evocation with which Keats conjures up Autumn for us, with all its varied sights and sounds, and its human activities vividly personified in the gleaner and the winnower

> sitting careless on a granary floor
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind,

or the couplet in which Coleridge brings before us a

[1] "Letter" to Mallet, August 11, 1726: "I thank you heartily for your hint about personizing of Inspiration: it strikes me."
[2] Cf. also "Winter," 794 and "Autumn," 143.

subtle suggestion of the spring beauty, to which the storms and snows are but a prelude :

> And winter, slumbering in the open air
> Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring.
> (" Work without Hope ")

Yet Thomson, as might be expected in a forerunner of the Romantic school, is not altogether without a gift for these embryonic personifications, as they have been called, when by means of a felicitous term or epithet the whole conception which the poet has in mind is suddenly galvanized into life and endowed with human feelings and emotions. Such evocations are of the very stuff of which poetry is made, and at their highest they possess the supreme power of stirring or awakening in the mind of the reader other pictures or visions than those suggested by the mere personification.[1]

Though some of Thomson's instances are conventional or commonplace, as in the description of

> the grey grown oaks
> That the calm village in their verdant arms
> Sheltering, embrace,
> (" Summer," 225-227)

and others merely imitative, as,

> the rosy-footed May
> Steals blushing on,
> (" Spring," 489-490)

yet there are many which call up by a single word a vivid and picturesque expression, such as the " hollow-whispering breeze " (" Summer," 919) or the poet's

[1] For some happy instances of its use in English poetry, as well as for a detailed account of Thomson's use of personification, see especially Morel, *op. cit.*, pp. 444-455.

description of the dismal solitude of a winter landscape

> It freezes on
> Till Morn, late rising o'er the drooping world
> Lifts her pale eyes unjoyous
> (" Winter," 744)

or the beautiful description of a spring dawn :

> The meek-eyed Morn appears, mother of dews
> At first faint-gleaming in the dappled east.
> (" Summer," 48-49)

Adverting to the question of Milton's influence on the prevalent mania for personification, it is undoubted that the early poems may be held largely responsible. Their influence first began noticeably to make itself felt in the fifth decade of the century, when their inspiration is to be traced in a great deal of the poetic output of the period, including that of Joseph and Thomas Warton, as well as of Collins and Gray. Neglecting for the moment the greater poets who drew inspiration from this source, it will be as well briefly to consider first the influence of Milton's minor poems on the obscure versifiers, for it is very often the case that the minor poetry of an age reflects most distinctly the peculiarities of a passing literary fashion. As early as 1739 William Hamilton of Bangour[1] imitated Milton in his octosyllabic poem " Contemplation," and by his predilection for abstraction foreshadowed one of the main characteristics of the Miltonic revival among the lesser lights. A single passage shows this clearly enough :

> Anger with wild disordered pace
> And malice pale of famish'd face :
> Loud-tongued Clamour get thee far
> Hence, to wrangle at the bar :

and so on.

[1] " Poets of Great Britain (1793), Vol. IX, p. 414.

Five or six years later Mason's Miltonic imitations appeared—" Il Bellicoso " and " Il Pacifico "—which follow even more slavishly the style of " L'Allegro " and " Il Penseroso," so that there is no need for Mason's footnote to " Il Bellicoso " describing the poem with its companion piece as this " very, very juvenile imitation."[1] " Il Bellicoso " begins with the usual dismissal :

> Hence, dull lethargic Peace
> Born in some hoary beadsman's cell obscure,

and subsequently we are introduced to Pleasure, Courage, Victory, Fancy, etc. There is a similar exorcism in " Il Pacifico," followed by a faint personification of the subject of the ode, attended by a " social smiling train " of lifeless abstractions.

The pages of Dodsley [2] furnish abundant testimony to the prevalence of this kind of thing. Thus " Penshurst " [3] by F. Coventry is another close imitation of Milton's companion poems, with the usual crowd of abstractions. The same thing is met with in the anonymous "Vacation,"[4] and in the "Valetudinarian," said to be written by Dr. Marriott.[5]

It is unnecessary to illustrate further the Milton vogue, which thus produced so large a crop of imitations,[6] except to say that there is significant testimony to the widespread prevalence of the fashion in the fact that a parody written " in the Allegoric, Descriptive, Alliterative, Epithetical, Fantastic, Hyperbolical, and

[1] " British Poets," Vol. XXII (1822), p. 117.

[2] " A Collection of Poems by several hands," 3 vols., 1748; 2nd edition, with Vol. IV, 1749; Vol. V and VI, 1758; Pearch's continuations, Vol. VII and VIII, 1768, and Vol. IX and X, 1770.

[3] " Dodsley " (1770 ed.), Vol. IV, p. 50.

[4] *Ibid.*, VI, 148.

[5] " Dodsley-Pearch," X, p. 5.

[6] *Vide* also Bell's " Fugitive Poetry " (1791), Vol. XI, where there is a section devoted to " Poems in the manner of Milton."

Diabolical Style of our modern Ode writers and monody-mongers "[1] soon appeared. This was the anonymous "Ode to Horror," a humorous burlesque, especially of the "Pleasures of Melancholy." The Wartons stand high above the versifiers at whose productions we have just looked, but nevertheless there was some justification for the good-humoured parody called forth by their works.

In 1746 there appeared a small volume entitled "Odes on Various Subjects," a collection of fourteen odes by Joseph Warton.[2] The influence of Milton is especially seen in the odes "To Fancy," "To Health," and to "The Nightingale," but all betray definitely the source of their inspiration. Thus in the first named:

> Me, Goddess, by the right hand lead
> Sometimes thro' the yellow mead
> Where Joy and White-robed Peace resort
> And Venus keeps her festive court.

All the odes of Warton betray an abundant use of abstractions, in the midst of which he rarely displays anything suggestive of spontaneous inspiration. His few personifications of natural powers are clearly imitative. "Evening" is "the meek-eyed Maiden clad in sober gray" and Spring comes

> array'd in primrose colour'd robe.

We feel all the time that the poet drags in his stock

[1] "Dodsley-Pearch," X, p. 269.

[2] At the same time there appeared a similar volume of the Odes of William Collins, "Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects," the original intention having been to publish in one volume. Collins's collection had a lukewarm reception, so that the author soon burned the unsold copies. But see Articles in "The Times Literary Supplement," January 5th (p. 5) and January 12, 1922 (p. 28), by Mr. H. O. White, on "William Collins and his Contemporary Critics," from which it would appear that the Odes were not received with such indifference as is commonly believed.

of personified abstractions only because he is writing odes, and considers that such devices add dignity to his subject.

At the same time it is worth noting that almost the same lavish use of these lay figures occurs in his blank verse poem, "The Enthusiast," or "The Lover of Nature" (1740), likewise written in imitation of Milton, and yet in its prophetic insight so important a poem in the history of the Romantic revival.[1] Lines such as

> Famine, Want and Pain
> Sunk to their graves their fainting limbs

are frequent, while there is a regular procession of qualities, more or less sharply defined, but not poetically suggestive enough to be effective.

The younger of the two brothers, Thomas Warton, who by his critical appreciation of Spenser did much in that manner to help forward the Romantic movement, was perhaps still more influenced by Milton. His ode on "The Approach of Summer" shows to what extent he had taken possession of the verse, language, and imagery of Milton:

> Haste thee, nymph, and hand in hand
> With thee lead a buxom band
> Bring fantastic-footed Joy
> With Sport, that yellow-tressed boy;
> Leisure, that through the balmy sky,
> Chases a crimson butterfly.

But nearly all his poems provide numerous instances of personified abstraction, especially the lines "Written at Vale Abbey," which seems to exhaust, and present as thin abstractions, the whole gamut of human virtues and vices, emotions and desires.[2]

[1] Cf. "Pope's Works," ed. Courthope and Elwin, Vol. V, p. 365.

[2] *Vide* also "The Triumph of Isis" (1749), and "The Monody written near Stratford-on-Avon." ("Poets of Great Britain," 1794, Vol. XI, pp. 1061–4.)

There is a certain irony in the fact that the two men who, crudely, perhaps, but nevertheless unmistakably, adumbrated the Romantic doctrine, should have been among the foremost to indulge in an excess against which later the avowed champion of Romanticism was to inveigh with all his power. This defect was perhaps the inevitable result of the fact that the Wartons had apparently been content in this respect to follow a contemporary fashion as revealed in the swarm of merely mechanical imitations of Milton's early poems. But their subjects were on the whole distinctly romantic, and this fact, added to their critical utterances, gives them real historical importance. Above all, it is to be remembered that they have for contemporaries the two great poets in whom the Romantic movement was for the first time adequately exemplified—William Collins and Thomas Gray.

The first published collection of Collins's work, "Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects" (1746), was, as we have seen, if not neglected or ignored by the public, at least received with marked indifference, owing largely no doubt to the abstract nature of his subjects, and the chiselled severity of his treatment.[1] In other words, Collins was pure classical and not neo-classical; he had gone direct back to the "gods of Hellas" for his inspiration, and his verse had a Hellenic austerity and beauty which could make little or no appeal to his own age. At the same time it was permeated through and through with new and striking qualities of feeling and emotion that at once aroused the suspicions of the neo-classicists, with Johnson as their mentor and spokesman. The "Odes" were then, we may say, classical in form and romantic in essence, and it is scarcely a matter for surprise

[1] Cf. Gosse, "A History of Eighteenth Century Literature" (1889), p. 233.

that a lukewarm reception should have been their lot.[1]

Collins has received merited praise for the charm and precision of his diction generally, and the fondness for inverting the common order of his words—Johnson's chief criticism of his poetical style[2]—is to the modern mind a venial offence compared with his use of personified abstractions. On this point Johnson has nothing to say, an omission which may be regarded as significant of the extent to which personification had invaded poetry, for the critic, if we may judge from his silence, seems to have considered it natural and legitimate for Collins also to have made abundant use of this stock and conventional device.

It is probable, however, that the extensive use which Collins makes of the figure is the result in a large measure of his predilection for the ode—a form of verse very fashionable towards the middle of the century. As has already been noted, odes were being turned out in large numbers by the poetasters of the time, in which virtues and vices, emotions and passions were invoked, apostrophized, and dismissed with appropriate gestures, and it is probable that the majority of these turgid and ineffective compositions owed their appearance to the prevalent mania for personification. Young remarked with truth[3] that an ode is, or ought to be, " more spontaneous and more remote from prose " than any other kind of poetry ; and doubtless it was some vague recognition of this fact, and in the hope of " elevating " their style, that led the mere versifiers to adopt the trick. But as they worked the mechanical personification to death, they

[1] Cf. Courthope, " Hist. Engl. Poetry," Vol. V, pp. 397-8.
[2] " Lives," ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, Vol. III, p. 341.
[3] " On Lyric Poetry—Poetical Works," ed. Mitford (Aldine, ed. 1896), Vol. II, p. 147.

quickly robbed it of any impressiveness it may ever have had.

This might quite fairly be described as the state of affairs with regard to the use of personified abstraction when Collins was writing his "odes," but while it is true that he indulges freely in personification, it is scarcely necessary to add that he does so with a difference; his Hellenic training and temperament naturally saved him from the inanities and otiosities of so much contemporary verse. To begin with, there are but few examples of the lifeless abstraction, and even in such cases there is usually present a happy epithet, or brief description that sets them on a higher level than those that swarm even in the odes of the Wartons. Thus in the "Ode on the Poetical Character," "the shadowy tribes of mind," which had been sadly overworked by Collins's predecessors and contemporaries, are brought before us with a new and fresh beauty that wins instant acceptance for them:

> But near it sat ecstatic Wonder
> Listening the deep applauding thunder
> And truth in sunny vest arrayed
> By whom the tassel's eyes were made
> All the shadowy tribes of mind
> In braided dance their murmurs joined.

Instances of the mechanical type so much in favour are, however, not lacking, as in this stanza from the "Verses" written about bride-cake:

> Ambiguous looks that scorn and yet relent,
> Denial mild and firm unaltered truth,
> Reluctant pride and amorous faint consent
> And melting ardours and exulting youth.[1]

The majority of Collins's personified abstractions

[1] In the Aldine edition, ed. Thomas (1901) these personified abstractions are not invested with a capital letter.

are, however, vague in outline, that is to say, they suggest, but do not define, and are therefore the more effective in that the resulting images are almost evanescent in their delicacy. Thus in the "Ode to Pity" the subject is presented to us in magic words:

> Long pity, let the nations view
> Thy sky-worn robes of tender blue
> And eyes of dewy light,

whilst still another imaginative conception is that of "Mercy":

> who sitt'st a smiling bride
> By Valour's armed and awful side
> Gentlest of sky-born forms and best adorned.

The "Ode to the Passions" is in itself almost an epitome of the various ways in which Collins makes use of personification. It is first to be noted that he rarely attempts to clothe his personifications in long and elaborate descriptions; most often they are given life and reality by being depicted, so to speak, moving and acting:

> Revenge impatient rose,
> He threw his blood-stained sword in thunder down,
> And with a withering look
> The war-denouncing trumpet took;
> Yet still he kept his wild unaltered mien
> Whilst his strained ball of sight seemed
> bursting from his head.

Even the figures, seen as it were but for a moment, are flashed before us in this manner:

> With woful measures wan Despair
> Low sullen sounds his grief beguiled

and

> Dejected Pity at his side
> Her soul-subduing voice applied

and the vision of hope with " eyes so fair " who

> smiled and waved her golden hair.

In this ode Collins gives us also imaginative cameos, we might call them, vividly delineated and presented like the figures on the Grecian urn that inspired Keats. Thus:

> While as his flying fingers kissed the strings,
> Love framed with mirth a gay fantastic round.

and, with its tinge of probably unconscious humour—

> Brown exercise rejoiced to hear,
> And Sport leapt up and seized his beechen spear.

From these and similar instances, we receive a definite impression of that motion, which is at the same time repose, so characteristic of classical sculptuary.

Most of the odes considered above are addressed to abstractions. In the few instances where Collins invokes the orders or powers of nature even greater felicity is shown in the art with which he calls up and clothes in perfect expression his abstract images. The first of the seasons is vaguely but subtly suggested to us in the beautiful ode beginning " How sleep the brave ":

> When Spring with dewy fingers cold
> Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
> She there shall dress a sweeter sod
> Than fancy's feet have ever trod.

This is rather a simile than a personification, but yet there is conveyed to us a definite impression of a shadowy figure that comes to deck the earth with beauty, like a young girl scattering flowers as she walks along.

But the workmanship of Collins in this respect is seen in its perfection in the " Ode to Evening." There is no attempt to draw a portrait or chisel a statue ; the calm, restful influence of evening, its sights and sounds that radiate peace and contentment, even the very soul of the landscape as the shades of night gather around, are suggested by master touches, whilst the slow infiltration of the twilight is beautifully suggested :

> Thy dewy fingers draw
> The gradual dusky veil.

The central figure is still the same evanescent being, the vision of a maiden, endowed with all the grace of beauty and dignity, into whose lap " sallow Autumn " is pouring his falling leaves, or who now goes her way slowly through the tempest, while

> Winter, yelling through the troublous air
> Affrights thy shrinking train,
> And rudely rends thy robe.

If we had no other evidence before us, Collins's use of personified abstraction would be sufficient in itself to announce that the new poetry had begun. He makes use of the device as freely, and even now and then as mechanically, as the inferior versifiers of his period, but instead of the bloodless abstractions, his genius enabled him to present human qualities and states in almost ethereal form. Into them he has breathed such poetic life and inspiration that in their suggestive beauty and felicity of expression they stand as supreme examples of personification used as a legitimate poetical device, as distinct from a mere rhetorical figure or embellishment.

This cannot be said of Gray, in whose verse mechanical personifications crowd so thickly that, as Coleridge

observed in his remarks on the lines from "The Bard,"

> In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes
> Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm

it depends "wholly on the compositors putting or not putting a small Capital, both in this and in many other passages of the same poet, whether the words should be personifications or mere abstractions."[1]

It is difficult to account for this devotion of Gray to the "new Olympus," thickly crowded with "moral deities" that his age had brought into being, except on the assumption that contemporary usage in this respect was too strong for him to resist. For it cannot be denied that very many of the beings that swarm in his odes do not differ in their essential character from the mechanical figures worked to death by the ode-makers of his days; even his genius was not able to clothe them all in flesh and blood. In the "Eton College" ode there is a whole stanza given over to a conventional catalogue of the "fury passions," the "vultures of the mind"; and similar thin abstractions people all the other odes. Nothing is visualized: we see no real image before us.[2] Even the famous "Elegy" is not without its examples of stiff personification, though they are not present in anything like the excess found elsewhere. The best that can be said for abstractions of this kind is that in their condensation they represent an economy of expression

[1] "Biographia Literaria" (ed. Shawcross, 1907), p. 12; cf. also "Table Talk" (October 23, 1833), ed. H. N. Coleridge (1858), p. 340. "Gray's personifications," he said, "were mere printer's devil's personifications," etc.

[2] Two of Gray's mechanical figures were marked down for special censure by Dr. Johnson ("Lives," Gray, ed. Birbeck Hill, Vol. III, p. 440), whose criticism was endorsed by Walpole ("Letters," Vol. III, p. 98), who likened "Fell Thirst and Famine" to the devils in "The Tempest" who whisk away the banquets from the shipwrecked Dukes.

that is not without dignity and effectiveness, and they thus sometimes give an added emphasis to the sentiment, as in the oft-quoted

> Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
> Their homely joys and destiny secure,
> Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
> The short and simple annals of the poor.

Gray rarely attempts to characterize his figures other than by the occasional use of a conventional epithet, and only here and there has the personification been to any extent filled in so as to form at least an outline picture. In the "Hymn to Adversity," Wisdom is depicted

> in sable garb arrayed
> Immersed in rapturous thought profound,

whilst other slight human touches are to be found here and there: as in "Moody Madness, laughing wild" ("Ode on a Distant Prospect"). His personifications, however, have seldom the clear-cut outlines we find in Collins, nor do they possess more than a tinge of the vividness and vitality the latter could breathe into his abstractions. Yet now and then we come across instances of the friezes in which Collins excels, moving figures depicted as in Greek plastic art

> Antic sports and blue-eyed Pleasures,
> Frisking light in frolic measures
> ("Progress of Poesy")

or the beautiful vision in the "Bard,"

> Bright Rapture calls and soaring as she sings,
> Waves in the eyes of heaven her many-coloured wings.

And in the "Ode on Vicissitude" Gray has one supreme example of the embryonic personification,

when the powers or orders of nature are invested with human attributes, and thus brought before us as living beings, in the form of vague but suggestive impressions that leave to the imagination the task of filling in the details :

> Now the golden Morn aloft
> Waves her dew-bespangled wing
> With vernal cheek and whisper soft
> She woos the tardy spring.

But in the main, and much more than the poet with whom his name is generally coupled, it is perhaps not too much to say that Gray was content to handle the device in the same manner as the uninspired imitators of the " L'Allegro " and " Il Penseroso." Not that he was unaware of the danger of such a tendency in himself and others. " I had rather," he wrote to Mason[1] when criticizing the latter's " Caractacus," " some of the personages—' Resignation,' ' Peace,' ' Revenge,' ' Slaughter,' ' Ambition '—were stripped of their allegorical garb. A little simplicity here and there in the expression would better prepare the high and fantastic harpings that follow." In the light of this most salutary remark, Gray's own procedure is only the more astonishing. His innumerable personifications may not have been regarded by Johnson as contributory to " the kind of cumbrous splendour " he wished away from the odes, but the fact that they are scarce in the " Elegy " is not without significance. The romantic feeling which asserts itself clearly in the odes, the new imaginative conceptions which these stock figures were called upon to convey, the perfection of the workmanship—these qualities were more than sufficient to counterweigh Gray's licence of indulgence in a mere rhetorical device. Yet Coleridge was right in calling attention

[1] " Letters " (December 19, 1786), Tovey, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 322.

to this defect of Gray's style, especially as his censure is no mere diatribe against the use of personified abstraction: it is firmly and justly based on the undeniable fact that Gray's personifications are for the most part cold and lifeless, that they are mere verbal abstractions, utterly devoid of the redeeming vitality, which Collins gives to his figures.[1] It is for this reason perhaps that his poetry in the mass has never been really popular, and that the average reader, with his impatience of abstractions, has been content, with Dr. Johnson, to pronounce boldly for "The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

Before proceeding to examine the works of the other great poets who announce or exemplify the Romantic revival, it will be convenient at this point to look at some of the Spenserian imitations, which helped to inspire and vitalize the revival.

Spenser was the poet of mediaeval allegory. In the "Faerie Queene," for the first time a real poet, endowed with the highest powers of imagination and expression, was able to present the old traditional abstractions wonderfully decked up in a new and captivating guise. The personages that move like dream figures through the cantos of the poem are thus no mere personified abstractions: they are rather pictorial emblems, many of which are limned for us with such grandeur of conception and beauty of execution as to secure for the allegorical picture a "willing suspension of disbelief," whilst the essentially romantic atmosphere more than atones for the cumbrous and obsolete machinery adopted by

[1] In this connexion mention may be made of "William Blake's Designs for Gray's Poems," recently published for the first time with a valuable introduction by H. J. C. Grierson (Oxford, 1922). "Blake's imagination," says Professor Grierson, "communicates an intenser life to Gray's half-conventional personifications" (Intro., p. 17).

Spenser to inculcate the lessons of "virtuous and gentle discipline."

Though the eighteenth century Spenserians make a plentiful use of personified abstraction, on the whole their employment of this device differs widely from its mechanical use by most of their contemporaries: in the best of the imitations there are few examples of the lifeless abstraction. Faint traces at least of the music and melody of the "Faerie Queene" have been caught and utilized to give a poetic charm even to the personified virtues and vices that naturally appear in the work of Spenser's imitators. Thus in William Thompson's "Epithalamium" (1736), while many of the old figures appear before us, they have something of the new charm with which Collins was soon to invest them. Thus,

> Liberty, the fairest nymph on ground
> The flowing plenty of her growing hair
> Diffusing lavishly ambrosia round
> Earth smil'd, and Gladness danc'd along the sky.

The epithets which accompany the abstractions are no longer conventional ("Chastity meek-ey'd," "Modesty sweet-blushing") and help to give touches of animation to otherwise inanimate figures. In the "Nativity" (1757) there is a freer use of the mere abstraction that calls up no distinct picture, but even here there are happy touches that give relief:

> Faith led the van, her mantle dipt in blue,
> Steady her ken, and gaining on the skies.

In the "Hymn to May" (1787) Thompson personified the month whose charms he is singing, the result being a radiant figure, having much in common with the classical personifications of the orders or powers of nature:

> A silken camus, em'rald green
> Gracefully loose, adown her shoulder flow.

In Shenstone's "Schoolmistress" (1737–1742) instances of personification are rare, and, where they do occur, are merely faint abstractions like "Learning near her little dome." It is noteworthy that one of the most successful of the Spenserian imitations should have dispensed with the cumbrous machinery of abstract beings that, on the model of the "Faerie Queene," might naturally have been drawn upon. The homely atmosphere of the "Schoolmistress," with its idyllic pictures and its gentle pathos, would, indeed, have been fatally marred by their introduction.

The same sparing use of personification is evident in the greatest of the imitations, James Thomson's "Castle of Indolence" (1748). A theme of this nature afforded plenty of opportunity to indulge in the device, and Thomson, judging from its use of the figure in some of his blank verse poems, might have been expected to take full advantage. But there are less than a score of examples in the whole of the poem. Only vague references are made to the eponymous hero: he is simply "Indolence" or "tender Indolence" or "the demon Indolence." For the rest Thomson's few abstractions are of the stock type, though occasionally more realistic touches result, we may suppose, from the poet's sense of humour as

> The sleepless Gout here counts the crowing cock.

Only here and there has Thomson attempted full-length portraits in the Spenserian manner, as when Lethargy, Hydropsy, and Hypochondria are described with drastic realism.[1]

The works of the minor Spenserians show a greater use of personified abstraction, but even with them there is no great excess. Moreover, where instances do

[1] Canto I: LXXIV–LXXV.

occur, they show imaginative touches foreign to the prevalent types. Thus in the "Vision of Patience" by Samuel Boyce (d. 1778),

> Silence sits on her untroubled throne
> As if she left the world to live and reign alone,

while Patience stands

> In robes of morning grey.

Occasionally the personified abstractions, though occurring in avowedly Spenserian imitations, obviously owe more to the influence of "L'Allegro"; as in William Whitehead's "Vision of Solomon" (1730), where the embroidered personifications are much more frequent than the detailed images given by Spenser.[1]

The work of Chatterton represents another aspect of this revival of the past, but it is curious to find that, in his acknowledged "original" verse there are not many instances of the personified abstraction, whilst they are freely used in the Rowley poems. Where they do occur in his avowedly original work they are of the usual type, though more imaginative power is revealed in his personification of Winter:

> Pale rugged Winter bending o'er his tread,
> His grizzled hair bedropt with icy dew:
> His eyes a dusky light congealed and dead,
> His robe a tinge of bright ethereal blue.

From our special point of view the "antiquarianism" of the Rowley poems might almost be disproved by the prevalence of abstractions and personifications, which in most instances are either unmistakably of the eighteenth century or which testify to the new Romantic atmosphere now manifesting itself. The

[1] Cp. also the detailed personification of "Thrift," given by Mickle in his "Syr Martyn" (1787).—"Poets of Great Britain" (1794), Vol. XI, p. 645.

stock types of frigid abstraction are all brought on the stage in the manner of the old Moralities, and each is given an ample speaking part in order to describe his own characteristics.

But in addition to these lifeless abstractions, there are to be found in the Rowley poems a large number of detailed and elaborate personifications. Some of these are full length portraits in the Spenserian manner, and now and then the resulting personification is striking and beautiful, as when, in "Ælla" (59), Celmond apostrophizes Hope, or the evocation of Truth in "The Storie of William Canynge."

Chatterton has also in these poems a few personifications of natural powers, but these are mainly imitative as in the lines ("Ælla," 94) reminiscent of Milton and Pope:[1]

> Bright sun had in his ruddy robes been dight
> From the red east he flitted with his train,
> The hours drew away the robe of night,
> Her subtle tapestry was rent in twain.

But the evocation of the seasons themselves, as in "Ælla" (32),

> When Autumn sere and sunburnt doth appear
> With his gold hand gilding the falling leaf
> Bringing up Winter to fulfil the year
> Bearing upon his back the ripened sheaf,

conveys a fresh and distinct picture that belongs to the new poetry, and has in it a faint forecast of Keats.

It remains to look at the work of the later eighteenth century poets, who announce that if the Romantic outburst is not yet, it is close at hand. The first and greatest of these is William Blake. His use of personification in the narrower sense which is our topic, is,

[1] Cf. "Paradise Lost," VI, 3; and Pope's "Iliad," V, 297.

of course, formally connected with the large and vital question of his symbolism, to treat of which here in any detail is not part of our scheme.

In its widest sense, however, Blake's mysticism may be connected with the great mediaeval world of allegory: it is "an eddy of that flood-tide of symbolism which attained its tide-mark in the magic of the Middle Ages."[1] But the poet himself unconsciously indicates the vital distinction between the new symbolism, which he inaugurates, and the old, of which the personified abstractions of his eighteenth century predecessors may be regarded as faint and faded relics. "Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers," he wrote to Thomas Butts,[2] "while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most surprising poetry."

On its formal side, and reduced to its simplest expression, we may narrow down for our present purpose the whole system to the further distinction drawn by Blake between Allegory and Vision. Allegory is "formed by the daughters of Memory" or the deliberate reason; Vision "is surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration." Here we have a key to the classification of personified abstractions in the eighteenth century, and, for that matter, at any and every period. Abstractions formed by the deliberate reason are usually more or less rhetorical embellishments of poetry, and to this category belong the great majority of the personifications of eighteenth century verse. They are "things that relate to moral virtues" or vices, but they cannot truly be called allegorical, for allegory is a living thing only so long as the ideas it embodies are real forces that control our conduct. The inspired personification, which embodies or brings with it a real vision, is the truly poetical figure.

[1] "Works" ed. Ellis and Yeats, Vol. I, Pref., x.
[2] July 6, 1803, "Letters," ed. A. G. B. Russell (1906), p. 121.

In Blake's own practice we find only a few instances of the typical eighteenth century abstraction. In the early "Imitation of Spenser" there are one or two examples:

> Such is sweet Eloquence that does dispel
> Envy and Hate that thirst for human gore,

whilst others are clearly Elizabethan reminiscences, like

> Mournful lean Despair
> Brings me yew to deck my grave,

or

> Memory, hither come
> And tune your merry notes.

"The Island in the Moon" furnishes grotesque instances, such as that of old Corruption dressed in yellow vest. In "The Divine Image," from the "Songs of Innocence," while commonplace virtues are personified, the simple direct manner of the process distinguishes them from their prototypes in the earlier moral and didactic poetry of the century:

> For Mercy has a human heart
> Pity a human face
> And Love, the human form divine
> And Peace the human dress.[1]

An instance of personification raised to a higher power is found in Blake's letter to Butts[2] beginning

> With Happiness stretch'd across the hills,
> In a cloud that dewy sweetness distils,

whilst elsewhere personified abstractions appear with new epithets, the most striking example being in

[1] In the parallel verses of "The Songs of Experience" the human attributes are attributed respectively to *Cruelty*, *Jealousy*, *Terror*, and *Secrecy*.

[2] "Poetical Works," ed. John Sampson (Oxford), 1914, p. 187.

" Earth's Answer," from the " Songs of Experience " :

> Prison'd on watry shore
> *Starry* Jealousy does keep my den.

Moreover, Blake's figures are often presented in an imaginative guise that helps to emphasize the gulf fixed between him and the majority of his contemporaries and predecessors. Thus " Joy " is twice depicted as a bird :

> Joys upon our branches sit
> Chirping loud and singing sweet
> (" Song "—" Poetical Sketches ")

and

> Welcome, stranger, to this place
> Where Joy doth sit on every bough.
> (" Song by a Shepherd ")

In Blake's youthful work the personifications of natural powers, though in most cases clearly imitative are yet striking in their beauty and power of suggestion. The influence of " Ossian " is seen in such " prose " personifications as " The Veiled Evening walked solitary down the Western hills and Silence reposed in the valley " (" The Couch of Death "), and " Who is this that with unerring step dares to tempt the wild where only Nature's foot has trod, 'Tis Contemplation, daughter of the Grey Morning " (" Contemplation "). Here also are evocations of the seasons which, whatever they may owe to Thomson or Collins, are new in that we actually get a picture of Spring with " dewy locks " as she looks down

> Thro' the clear windows of the morning

of summer with

> ruddy limbs and flourishing hair,

of the " jolly autumn,"

> laden with fruits and stained
> With the blood of the grape ;

and of winter,

> a dreadful monster whose skin clings
> To her strong bones.

Thomson, we have seen, had not been altogether successful in his personification of the seasons: here they are brought vividly and fittingly before us. When we think of the hosts of puppets that in the guise of personified abstractions move mechanically through so much of eighteenth century verse, and compare them with the beautiful visions evoked by Blake, we know from this evidence alone that the reign of one of the chief excesses of the poetical language of the time is near its end. It is not that Blake's conceptions are all flesh and blood creations: often they are rather ethereal beings, having something in common with the evanescent images of Collins. But the rich and lofty imagination that has given them birth is more than sufficient to secure their acceptance as realities capable of living and moving before us; the classical abstraction, cold and lifeless, has now become the Romantic personification clothed in beauty and animated with life and inner meaning.

In the year of the "Poetical Sketches" (1783) George Crabbe published "The Village," his first work to meet with any success. But whilst Blake gloriously announces the emancipation of English poetry, Crabbe for the most part is still writing on in the old dead style. The heroic couplets of his earliest works have all the rhetorical devices of his predecessors in that measure, and amongst these the prevalence of personified abstractions is not the least noteworthy. The subject of his first poem of any length, "Inebriety" (1775), afforded him plenty of scope in this direction, and he availed himself fully of the opportunity.[1]

[1] *Vide*, e.g., ll. 18–26.

The absence of capital letters from some of the instances in this poem may perhaps be taken to reflect a confusion in the poet's mind as to whether he was indulging in personification or in mere abstraction, to adopt Coleridge's remark anent Gray's use of this figure.[1]

In " The Village," Crabbe's first poem of any real merit, there is a more sparing use, yet instances are even here plentiful, whilst his employment of the device had not died out when in the early years of the nineteenth century he resumed his literary activities. Among the poems published in the 1807 volume there is a stiff and cumbrous allegory entitled " The Birth of Flattery," which, introduced by three Spenserian stanzas, depicts Flattery as the child of Poverty and Cunning, attended by guardian satellites, " Care," " Torture," " Misery," *et hoc omne genus.* They linger on to the time of the " Posthumous Tales," where there is a sad, slow procession of them, almost, we might imagine, as if they were conscious of the doom pronounced years before, and of the fact that they were strangers in a strange land :

> Yet Resignation in the house is seen
> Subdued Affliction, Piety serene,
> And Hope, for ever striving to instil
> The balm for grief, " It is the heavenly will.
> (XVIII, 299 foll.)

It is not perhaps too fanciful to see in this lament a palinode of the personifications themselves, sadly resigning themselves to an inevitable fate.

Towards the ultimate triumph of the new poetry the work of William Cowper represents perhaps the most important contribution, judging at least from the viewpoint both of its significance as indicating new tendencies in literature, and of its immediate influence on readers and writers. In the narrow sense of style

[1] See also, e.g., " Midnight," l. 272 foll. and l. 410 foll.

the "simplicity" which was Cowper's ideal was only occasionally marred by the conventional phraseology and bombastic diction which he himself laid to the charge of the "classical" school, and his gradual emancipation from the tenets and practices of that school is reflected in his steady advance towards the purity of expression for which he craved. And in this advance it is to be noted that the gradual disappearance of personified abstractions is one of the minor landmarks.

The earlier work furnishes instances of the common type of mere abstraction where there is no attempt to give any real personification. Even in the "Olney Hymns" (1779) such verses as

> But unbelief, self-will
> Self-righteousness and pride,
> How often do they steal
> My weapon from my side

only seem to present the old mechanical figures in a new setting.[1] The long series of satiric poems that followed draw freely upon the same "mythology," and indeed the satires that appear in this 1782 volume recall to some extent the style of Churchill.[2] There

[1] A similar type of abstraction is found here and there in the stanzas of the "Song to David" (1763), e.g.:

> 'Twas then his thoughts self-conquest pruned
> And heavenly melancholy tuned
> To bless and bear the rest.

But on the whole Smart's famous poem is singularly free from the bane, though the "Hymn to the Supreme Being" (*vide* "A Song to David," edited Tutin (1904), Appendix, p. 32), has not escaped the contagion. But better instances are to be found in the Odes ("Works," 1761–1762), e.g., "Strong Labour . . . with his pipe in his mouth," "Health from his Cottage of thatch," etc. *Vide* also article on "Christopher Smart," "Times Literary Supplement," April 6, 1922, p. 224.

[2] Cf. "Poems of William Cowper," ed. J. C. Bailey (1905), Intro., p. xl.

is a somewhat similar, though more restricted, use of personified abstraction, and, as in Churchill's satires, virtues and vices are invested with slight human qualities and utilized to enforce moral and didactic truths. Thus,

> Peace follows Virtue as its sure reward
> And Pleasure brings as surely in her train
> Remorse and Sorrow and Vindictive Pain.
> ("Progress of Error")

Among the short pieces in this volume are the famous lines put into the mouth of Alexander Selkirk, which contain a fine example of the apostrophic personification, the oft-quoted

> O Solitude! where are thy charms
> That sages have seen in thy face,

where the passion and sincerity of the appeal give dignity and animation to an otherwise lifeless abstraction, and, despite the absence of detail, really call up a definite picture.

From the blank verse of his most famous work nearly every trace of the mechanical abstraction has disappeared—a great advance when we remember that "The Task" is in the direct line of the moral and didactic verse that had occupied so many of Cowper's predecessors.

The first Books ("The Sofa") contain but one instance and that in a playful manner:

> Ingenious Fancy, never better pleased
> Than when employed to accommodate the fair.
> (ll. 72 foll.)

The Fourth Book ("The Winter Evening") is entirely free from instances of the mechanical abstraction, but the vision of Oriental Empire, and the

fascination of the East, is effectively evoked in the personification of the land of the Moguls :

> Is India free ? and does she wear her plumed
> And jewelled turban with a smile of peace.
> (ll. 28-9)

" The Task," however, has two examples of the detailed personification. The first is an attempt, in the manner of Spenser, to give a full length portrait of " a sage called Discipline " :

> His eye was meek and gentle and a smile
> Played on his lips, and in his speech was heard
> Paternal sweetness
> (Bk. II, l. 702 foll.)

where there is a depth of feeling, as well as a gentle satiric touch in the delineation, that animate it into something more than a mere stock image ; it embodies perhaps a reminiscence of one who at some time or other had guided the destinies of the youthful Cowper.

The second instance is of a more imaginative kind. It is the presentation, in the Fourth Book, of Winter, with

> forehead wrapt in cloud
> A leafless branch thy sceptre,

almost the only occasion on which Cowper, despite the nature of his subject, has personified the powers and orders of nature.[1] Cowper has also invested the Evening with human attributes, and despite the

[1] There are faint personifications of the other seasons in Book III, ll. 427 foll., but none perhaps as effective as William Mickle had already given in his ode, " Vicissitude," where he depicts Winter staying :

> his creeping steps to pause
> And wishful turns his icy eyes
> On April meads.

imitative ring of the lines,[1] and the " quaintness " of the images employed, there is a new beauty in the evocation :

> Come, Evening, once again, season of peace ;
> Return, sweet Evening, and continue long !
> Methinks I see thee in the streaky west
> With matron step slow-moving, while the night
> Treads on thy sweeping train.

The darkness soon to fall over the landscape is suggested in the added appeal to Evening to come

> Not sumptuously adorned, nor needing aid
> Like homely-featured Night, of clustering gems,

where the compound epithet emphasizes the contrast between the quiet beauty of the twilight skyscape and the star-sprinkled gloom of the night.

Finally, one of the last instances of the personified abstraction to be found in the work of Cowper may perhaps be taken to reflect something of the changes that have been silently working underneath. This is in the lines that suddenly bring " Yardley Oak " to an end :

> History not wanted yet
> Leaned on her elbow watching Time whose course
> Eventful should supply her with a theme.

At first glance we seem to have here but the old conventional figures, but there is an imaginative touch that helps to suggest a new world of romance. " History leaning on her elbow " has something at least of that mysterious power of suggestion that

[1] *Streaky*, for instance, is due to Thomson who, in the first draft of " Summer " (ll. 47–48) had written :

> Mildly elucent in the streaky east,

later changed to

> At first faint-gleaming in the dappled east.

Wordsworth himself was to convey by means of the romantic personification, such as those shadowy figures—Fear and Trembling Hope, and Death the Skeleton, and Time the Shadow—which gathered round and hallowed the shade of the yew trees in Borrowdale.

But even while the old poetry was in its death agony a champion was at hand, daring to maintain a lost cause both by precept and example. This was Erasmus Darwin, whose once-famous work "The Botanic Garden," with its two parts, "The Loves of the Plants" (1789), and "The Economy of Vegetation" (1791), has earlier been mentioned.

It met with immediate success. Darwin seems to have fascinated his contemporaries, so that even Coleridge was constrained in 1802 to call him "the first literary character in Europe."[1] He had, however, little real admiration for "The Botanic Garden," and later expressed his opinion unmistakably.[2] "The Botanic Garden" soon died a natural death, hastened no doubt by the ridicule it excited, but inevitably because of the fact that the poem is an unconscious *reductio ad absurdum* of a style already doomed.[3] The special matter with which we are concerned in this chapter had for Darwin a marked significance, since it fitted in admirably with his general doctrine or dogma that nothing is strictly poetic except what is presented in visual image. His "theory" was that, just as the old mythologies had created a whole world of personified abstractions to explain or interpret natural phenomena of every description, exactly by the same method the scientific thought and develop-

[1] "Letters," edited E. Coleridge, 1895, p. 215.
[2] "Biographia Literaria," Chap. I.
[3] The ridicule was crystallized in Canning's famous parody, "The Loves of the Triangles," which appeared in "The Anti-Jacobin," Nos. 23, 24 and 26, April to May, 1798. (*Vide* "The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin," edited C. Edmonds, 1854, 3rd edition, 1890.)

ments of his own age could be poetically expounded so as to captivate both the hearts and minds of his readers. It was his ambition, he said, "to enlist imagination under the banner of science." This "theory" is expounded in one of the interludes placed between the different cantos. "The poet writes principally to the eye," and allegory and personifications are to be commended because they give visible form to abstract conceptions.[1] Putting his theory into practice, Darwin then proceeds with great zeal to personify the varied and various scientific facts or hypotheses of physics, botany, etc., metamorphosing the forces of the air and other elements into sylphs and gnomes and so on. Thus,

> Soon shall thy arm, Unconquered
> Steam afar
> Drag the slow barge or drive the
> Rapid car.
> (E.V., Canto I, 289, 290)

In the same way all the plants, as classified by Linnæus, are personified as "swains" or "belles" who "love" and quarrel, and finally make it up just as ordinary mortals do:

> All wan and shivering in the leafless glade
> The sad Anemone reclin'd her head
> (L.P., Canto I, 315-6)

or

> Retiring Lichen climbs the topmost stone
> And drinks the aerial solitude alone.
> (*Ibid.*, 347-8)

The whole poem is thus one long series of mechanical personifications which baffle and bewilder and finally

[1] "The Botanic Garden" (4th edition, 1799), Interlude I, Vol. II, p. 64. Cp. also *ibid.*, Interlude III, p. 182 foll.

wear out the reader. It is strange now to think that "The Botanic Garden" was at the height of its vogue when the "Lyrical Ballads" were being planned and written, but the easy-flowing couplets of Darwin, and the "tinsel and glitter" of his diction, together with most of the "science" he was at such pains to expound (though he was a shrewd and even prophetic inquirer in certain branches, such as medicine and biology), have now little more than a faint historical interest. Yet his theory and practice of poetry—the "painted mists that occasionally rise from the marshes at the foot of Parnassus," Coleridge called them—so dominated the literature of the last decade of the eighteenth century as to be capable of captivating the mind of the poet who was about to sound their death-knell.

While Wordsworth inveighed against "personification" in the great manifesto, his earliest poetry shows clearly, as has been noted, that in this as in other respects he had fallen under the spell and influence of "The Botanic Garden." The "Evening Walk" and the "Descriptive Sketches" swarm with instances of personifications of the type that had flourished apace for a hundred years, "Impatience," "Pain," "Independence," "Hope," "Oppression," and dozens similar.[1] There is thus a certain comic irony in the fact that the poet, who was the first to sound the revolt against "personifications" and similar "heightenings" of style, should have embarked on his literary career with the theft of a good deal of the thunder of the enemy. Later, when Wordsworth's true ideal of style had evolved itself, this feature of the two poems was in great measure discarded. The first (1793) draft of the "Descriptive Sketches" contains over seventy examples of more or less frigid

[1] For details see Legouis, *op. cit.*

abstractions; in the final draft of the poem these have dwindled down to about a score.[1]

In our detailed examination of personification in eighteenth century poetry we have seen that in general it includes three main types. There is first the mere abstraction, whose distinctive sign is the presence of a capital letter; it may be, and often is, qualified by epithets suggestive of human attributes, but there is little or no attempt to give a definite picture or evoke a distinctive image. This is the prevalent type, and it is against these invertebrates that the criticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge was really directed.

Their widespread use in the eighteenth century is due to various causes. In the first place they represent a survival, however artificial and lifeless, of the great mediaeval world of allegory, with its symbolic representation derived from the pagan and classical mythologies, of the attributes of the divine nature, and of the qualities of the human mind, as living entities. But by now the life had departed from them; they were hopelessly effete and had become consciously conventional and fictitious.[2]

They also owed their appearance, as indicated above, to more definite literary causes and "fashions"; they swarm especially, for instance, in the odes of the mid-century, the appearance of which was mainly due to the influence of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." The virtues and vices, the "shadowy tribes of the mind," which are there unceasingly invoked and dismissed are mechanical imitations of the figures

[1] Both the original and the final versions of the "Evening Walk," and the "Descriptive Sketches" are given by Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, Appendix, pp. 592, 601.

[2] But the artistic possibilities of Personification were not unrecognized by writers and critics in the eighteenth century. *Vide* Blair's lecture on "Personification" ("Lectures on Rhetoric") 9th edition, 1803; Lec. XVI, p. 375.

that the genius of Milton had been able to inspire with real poetic value and life. They play their part similarly and just as mechanically in the didactic and satirical verse characteristic of the period.

But whether regarded as a sort of literary flotsam and jetsam, or as one of the symptoms of "Milton-mad" verse, these personifications are nearly all enfeebled by weaknesses inherent in their very genesis. Only a deep and intense conception of a mental abstraction can justify any attempt to personify it poetically; otherwise the inevitable result is a mere rhetorical ornament, which fails because it conveys neither the "vast vagueness" of the abstract, nor any clear-cut pictorial conception of the person. Even with Gray, as with the mere poetasters who used this figure to excess, it has the effect of a dull and wearisome mannerism; only here and there, as in the sonorous lines in which Johnson personified Worth held down by Poverty, does the display of personal emotion give any dignity and depth to the image.

Again, the very freedom with which the conventional abstractions are employed, allowing them to be introduced on every possible occasion, tends to render the device absurd, if not ludicrous. For the versifiers seemed to have at their beck and call a whole phantom army upon which they could draw whenever they chose; for them they are veritable gods from the machines. But so mechanical are their entrances and exits that the reader rarely suspects them to be intended for "flesh and blood creations," though, it may be added, the poetaster himself would be slow to make any such claim. To him they are merely part of his stock-in-trade, like the old extravagances, the "conceits," and far-fetched similes of the Metaphysical school.

The second type of personification found in eighteenth century verse needs but brief mention here. It is the detailed personification where a full-length portrait is attempted. Like the mere abstraction it, too, is a survival of mediaeval allegory, and it is also most often a merely mechanical literary process, reflecting no real image in the poet's mind. It is not found to any large extent, and in a certain measure owes its presence to the renewed interest in Spenser. The Spenserian imitations themselves are comparatively free from this type, a sort of negative indication of the part played by the revival in the new Romantic movement.

The third type is perhaps best described as the embryonic personification. It consists in the attributing of an individual and living existence to the visible forms and invisible powers of nature, a disposition, deeply implanted in the human mind from the very dawn of existence, which has left in the mythologies and creeds of the world a permanent impress of its power. In eighteenth century literature this type received its first true expression in the work of Thompson and Collins, whilst its progress, until it becomes merged and fused in the pantheism of Wordsworth and Shelley, may be taken as a measure of the advance of the Romantic movement in one of its most vital aspects.

Regarded on its purely formal side, that is, as part and parcel of the *language* of poetry, the use of personification may then be naturally linked up with the generally literary development of the period. In the "classical" verse proper the figure employed is, as it were, a mere word and no more; it is the reflex of precisely as much individual imagination as the stock phrases of descriptive verse, *the flowery meads, painted birds*, and so on. There was no writing with the inner eye on the object, and the abstraction as a

result was a mere rhetorical label, corresponding to no real vision of things.

The broad line of advance in this, as in other aspects of eighteenth century literature, passes through the work of those who are now looked upon as the forerunners of the Romantic revolt. The frigid abstraction, a mere word distinguished by a capital letter, is to be found in " The Seasons," but alongside there is also an approach to definite pictorial representation of the object personified. In the odes of Collins the advent of the pictorial image is definitely and triumphantly announced, and though the mechanical abstractions linger on even until the new poetry has well established itself, they are only to be found in the work of those who either, like Johnson and Crabbe, belong definitely as regards style to the old order, or like Goldsmith and, to a less extent, Cowper, reflect as it were a sort of half-way attitude towards the old and the new.

With Blake the supremacy of the artistic personification is assured. His mystical philosophy in its widest aspect leads him to an identification of the divine nature with the human, but sometimes this signification is to be seen merging into a more conscious symbolism, or even sinking into that " totally distinct and inferior kind of poetry " known as allegory. Yet with Blake the poet, as well as Blake the artist, the use of personified abstraction is an integral part of the symbolism he desired to perpetuate. His imagination ran strongly in that direction, and it has been aptly pointed out that his most intense mental and emotional experiences became for him spiritual persons. But even where the presence of a capital letter is still the only distinguishing mark of the personification, he is able, either by the mere context or by the addition of a suggestive epithet, to transform and

transfigure the abstraction into a poetical emblem of the doctrine whose apostle he believed himself to be.

It is hardly necessary to say that the use of personification and abstraction, even in their narrower applications as rhetorical ornaments or artifices of verse, were not banished from English poetry as a result of Wordsworth's criticism. Ruskin has drawn a penetrating distinction between personification and symbolism,[1] and it was in this direction perhaps that Wordsworth's protest may be said to have been of the highest value. His successors, for the most part, distrustful of mere abstractions, and impatient of allegory, with its attendant dangers of lifeless and mechanical personification, were not slow to recognize the inherent possibilities of symbolism as an artistic medium for the expression of individual moods and emotions, and it is not too much to say that in its successful employment English poetry has since won some of its greatest triumphs.

[1] "The Stones of Venice" (1851), Vol. II, Chap. VIII, pp. 312 foll.—The Ducal Palace, "Personification is, in some sort, the reverse of symbolism, and is far less noble. Symbolism is the setting forth of a great truth by an imperfect and inferior sign . . . and it is almost always employed by men in their most serious moods of faith, rarely in recreation. . . . But Personification is the bestowing of a human or living form upon an abstract idea; it is in most cases, a mere recreation of the fancy, and is apt to disturb the belief in the reality of the thing personified."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DICTION OF POETRY

AFTER years of comparative neglect, and, it must be admitted, a good deal of uncritical disparagement, the "age of prose and reason" would seem at last to have come into its own. Or at any rate during recent years there has become evident a disposition to look more kindly on a period which has but seldom had justice done to it. The label which Matthew Arnold's dictum attached to a good portion, if not the whole, of the eighteenth century seems to imply a period of arid and prosaic rationalism in which "the shaping spirit of imagination" had no abiding place, and this has no doubt been partly responsible for the persistency of an unjust conception. But it is now more generally recognized that, in prose and even in poetry, the seventy or eighty years, which begin when Dryden died, and end when William Blake was probably writing down the first drafts of his "Poetical Sketches," had some definite and far from despicable legacies to pass on to its successors, to the writers in whom the Romantic revival was soon to be triumphantly manifested. The standards in all branches of literature were to be different, but between "classical" and "romantic" there was not to be, and indeed could not be, any great gulf fixed. There was continuity and much was handed on. What had to be transformed (and of course the process is to be seen at work in the very

height of the Augustan supremacy) were the aims and methods of literature, both its matter in large measure, and its style.[1]

It is the poetry of the period with which we are specially concerned, and it is in poetry that the distinction between the old order and the new was to be sharpest ; for the leaders of the revolt had been gradually winning new fields, or re-discovering old ones, for poetry, and thus in more than one sense the way had been prepared for both the theory and practice of Wordsworth. Then came the great manifestoes, beginning with the Preface of 1798, followed by an expansion in 1800 and again in 1802 ; fifteen years later, Coleridge, with his penetrating analysis of the theories advanced by his friend and fellow-worker, began a controversy, which still to-day forms a fruitful theme of discussion.

Wordsworth, in launching his famous declaration of principle on the language fit and proper for metrical composition, had no doubt especially in mind the practice of his eighteenth century predecessors. But it has to be remembered that the *Prefaces* deal in reality with the whole genesis of " what is usually called poetic diction," and that the avowed aim and object was to sweep away " a large portion of phrases and figures of speech, which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of poets." The circumstances of the time, and perhaps the examples chosen by Wordsworth to illustrate his thesis, have too often led to his attack being considered as concerned almost entirely with the poetical language of the eighteenth century. Hence, whenever the phrase " poetic diction " is mentioned as a term of English literary history, more often than not it is to the eighteenth century that the attention

[1] For an illuminating analysis, see Elton, " A Survey of English Literature," 1780–1830 (1912), pp. 1–29.

is directed, and the phrase itself has taken on a derogatory tinge, expressive of a stereotyped language, imitative, mechanical, lifeless. For in the reaction against eighteenth century styles, and especially against the polished heroic couplet, there arose a tendency to make the diction of the period an object of undistinguishing depreciation, to class it all in one category, as a collection of conventional words and phrases of which all poets and versifiers felt themselves at liberty to make use.

An actual analysis of eighteenth century poetry shows us that this criticism is both deficient and misleading; it is misleading because it neglects to take any account of that eighteenth century poetical language which Pope, inheriting it from Dryden, brought to perfection, and which was so admirable a vehicle for the satiric or didactic thought it had to convey; it is deficient in that it concentrates attention mainly on one type or variety of the language, used both by poets and poetasters, and persists in labelling this type either as the "eighteenth century style proper," or, as if the phrases were synonymous, "the Pope style."

One formula could no more suffice in itself for the poetic styles of the eighteenth century than for those of the nineteenth century; we may say, rather, that there are then to be distinguished at least four distinct varieties or elements of poetical diction, in the narrow sense of the term, though of course it is scarcely necessary to add that none of them is found in complete isolation from the others. There is first the stock descriptive language, the usual vehicle of expression for that large amount of eighteenth century verse where, in the words of Taine, we can usually find "the same diction, the same apostrophes, the same manner of placing the epithet and rounding the period," and "regarding which we know beforehand

with what poetic ornaments it will be adorned."[1] In reading this verse, with its lifeless, abstract diction, we seldom or never feel that we have been brought into contact with the real thoughts or feelings of living men. Its epithets are artificial, imitative, conventional; though their glare and glitter may occasionally give us a certain pleasure, they rarely or never make any appeal to our sensibility. As someone has said, it is like wandering about in a land of empty phrases. Only here and there, as, for instance, in Dyer's "Grongar Hill," have the *gradus* epithets taken on a real charm and beauty in virtue of the spontaneity and sincerity with which the poet has been inspired.

The received doctrine that it was due in the main to Pope's "Homer" is unjust; many of the characteristics of this conventional poetical language were established long before Pope produced his translation. They are found to an equal, if not greater, extent in Dryden, and if it is necessary to establish a fountain-head, "Paradise Lost" will be found to contain most of the words and phrases which the eighteenth century versifiers worked to death. If Pope is guilty in any degree it is only because in his work the heroic couplet was brought to a high pitch of perfection; no doubt too the immense popularity of the "Homer" translation led to servile imitation of many of its words, phrases, and similes. Yet it is unjust to saddle Pope with the lack of original genius of so many of his successors and imitators.

But the underlying cause of this conventional language must be sought elsewhere than in the mere imitation of any poet or poets. A passage from the "Prelude" supplies perhaps a clue to one of the fundamental conditions that had enslaved poetry in the shackles of a stereotyped language. It takes the

[1] "Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise," Vol. IV, pp. 175–178.

form of a sort of literary confession by Wordsworth as to the method of composing his first poems, which, we have seen, are almost an epitome of the poetical vices against which his manifestoes rebelled. He speaks of

> the trade in classic niceties
> The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
> From languages that want the living voice
> To carry meaning to the natural heart.
> ("Prelude," Bk. VI, ll. 109–112)

In these lines we have summed up one of the main Romantic indictments against the practice of the "classical" poets, who were too wont to regard the language of poetry as a mere collection or accepted aggregate of words, phrases, and similes, empty of all personal feeling and emotion.[1]

Wordsworth, too, in this passage not unfairly describes the sort of atmosphere in which diction of the stock eighteenth century type flourished. The neo-classical interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of poetry as an imitation had by the time of Pope and his school resulted in a real critical confusion, which saw the essence of poetry in a slavish adherence to accepted models, and regarded its ideal language as choice flowers and figures of speech consecrated to poetry by traditional use, and used by the poet very much as the painter uses his colours, that is, as pigments laid on from the outside. That this doctrine of imitation and parallelism directly encourages the growth of a set poetic diction is obvious; the poet's language need not be the reflection of a genuine emotion felt in the mind: he could always find his words, phrases, and figures of speech in accepted and consecrated models.

[1] Cf. Coleridge's remarks in "Biographia Literaria," ed. Shawcross, Chap. I (Oxford, 1907).

The reaction against this artificial diction is fundamental in the Romantic revolt from another cause than that of poetic form. The stock poetic language, we have seen, occurs mainly in what may be called the " nature " poetry of the period, and its set words and phrases are for the most part descriptive terms of outdoor sights and sounds. Among the many descriptions or explanations of the Romantic movement is that it was in its essence a " return to Nature," which is sometimes taken to imply that " Nature," as we in the twentieth century think of it, was a sudden new vision, of which glimpses were first caught by James Thomson, and which finally culminated in Wordsworth's " confession of faith." Yet there was, of course, plenty of " nature poetry " in the neo-classical period ; but it was for the most part nature from the point of view of the Town, or as seen from the study window with a poetical " Thesaurus " at the writer's side, or stored in his memory as a result of his reading. It was not written with " the eye on the object." More fatal still, if the neo-classical poets did look, they could see little beauty in the external world ; they " had lost the best of the senses ; they had ceased to perceive with joy and interpret with insight the colour and outline of things, the cadence of sound and motion, the life of creatures."[1]

This sterility or atrophy of the senses had thus a real connexion with the question of a conventional poetical language, for the descriptive diction with its stock words for the sea, the rivers, the mountains, the sky, the stars, the birds of the air and their music, for all the varied sights and sounds of outdoor life—all this is simply a reflex of the lack of genuine feeling towards external nature. Keats, with his ecstatic delight in Nature, quickly and aptly

[1] Elton, " The Augustan Ages " (1895), p. 211.

pilloried this fatal weakness in the eighteenth century versifiers :

> The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
> Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue
> Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
> Of summer nights collected still to make
> The morning precious : beauty was awake !
> Why were ye not awake ! But ye were dead
> To things ye knew not of—were closely wed
> To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
> And compass vile : so that ye taught a school
> Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip and fit
> Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
> Their verses tallied ; Easy was the task
> A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
> Of Poesy.[1]

It is obvious that two great changes or advances were necessary, if poetry was to be freed from the bondage of this conventional diction. In the first place, the poet must reject root and branch the traditional stock of words and phrases that may once have been inspiring, but had become lifeless and mechanical long before they fell into disuse ; he must write with his eye on the object, and translate his impressions into fresh terms endowed with real, imaginative power. And this first condition would naturally lead to a second, requiring every word and phrase to be a spontaneous reflection of genuine feeling felt in the presence of Nature and her vast powers.

The neo-classical poetry proper was not without verse which partly satisfied these conditions ; direct contact with nature was never entirely lost. Wordsworth, as we know, gave honourable mention[1] to "The Nocturnal Reverie" of Anne, Countess Winchilsea, written at the very height of the neo-classical supremacy, in which external nature is

[1] "Sleep and Poetry," ll. 188–201.
[1] Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 948.

described with simplicity and fidelity, though there is little trace of any emotion roused in the writer's mind by the sights and sounds of outdoor life. And every now and then, amid the arid and monotonous stretches of so much eighteenth century verse, we are startled into lively interest by stumbling across, often in the most obscure and unexpected corners, a phrase or a verse to remind us that Nature, and all that the term implies, was still making its powerful appeal to the hearts and minds of men, that its beauty and mystery was still being expressed in simple and heart-felt language. Thomas Dyer's "Grongar Hill" has already been mentioned; it was written in 1726, the year of the publication of Thompson's "Winter." Dyer, for all we know, may have the priority, but in any case we see him here leading back poetry to the sights and sounds and scents of external nature, which he describes, not merely as a painter with a good eye for landscape, but as a lover who feels the thrill and call of the country-side, and can give exquisite expression to his thoughts and emotions. We have only to recall such passages as

> Who, the purple evening lie,
> On the mountain's lonely van;

or even his tree catalogue,

> The gloomy pine, the poplar blue,
> The yellow beech, the sable yew,
> The slender fir, that taper grows,
> The sturdy oak with broad-spread boughs;

or

> How close and small the hedges lie;
> What streaks of meadow cross the eye!

or

> A little rule, a little sway,
> A sun-beam on a winter's day,
> Is all the proud and mighty have
> Between the cradle and the grave—

to recognize that already the supremacy of Pope and his school of town poets is seriously threatened.

Here too is a short passage which might not unfairly be assigned to Wordsworth himself.

> Would I again were with you, O ye dales
> Of Tyne, and ye most ancient woodlands, where,
> Oft as the giant flood obliquely strides
> And his banks open, and his lawns extend,
> Stops short the pleased traveller to view,
> Presiding o'er the scene, some rustic tower
> Founded by Norman or by Saxon hands :
> O ye Northumbrian shades, which overlook
> The rocky pavement and the mossy falls
> Of solitary Wensbeck's limpid stream,
> How gladly I recall your well-known seats
> Beloved of old, and that delightful time
> When all alone, for many a summer's day,
> I wandered through your calm recesses, led
> In silence by some powerful hand unseen.

It is from Mark Akenside's "Pleasures of the Imagination" (Bk IV, ll. 31 foll). And so, too, is this :

> the meadow's fragrant hedge,
> In spring time when the woodlands first are green
> (Book II, 175-6)

which takes us far away from the formal conventional landscapes of the Augustans.

These two are among the more famous of their time, but a close search amongst the minor poetry of the mid-eighteenth century will bring to light many a surprising instance of poetry written with an eye on the object, as in John Cunningham's (1729–1773) "Day,"[1] where the sights and sounds of the country-side are simply and freshly brought before us :

> Swiftly from the mountain's brow,
> Shadows, nurs'd by night, retire :
> And the peeping sun-beam, now,
> Paints with gold the village spire.

[1] "Poets of Great Britain" (1794), Vol. X, p. 709.

Philomel forsakes the thorn,
Plaintive where she prates at night;
And the Lark, to meet the morn,
Soars beyond the shepherd's sight.

From the low-roof'd cottage ridge,
See the chatt'ring Swallow spring;
Darting through the one-arch'd bridge,
Quick she dips her dappled wing.

But the great bulk of neo-classical verse is unaffected by the regained and quickened outlook on the external world. It is in the forerunners of the Romantic revolt that this latter development is to be most plainly noted: when, as the result of many and varied causes English poets were inspired to use their eyes again, they were able, slowly and in a somewhat shallow manner at first, afterwards quickly and profoundly, to "sense" the beauty of the external world, its mysterious emanations of power and beauty. This quickening and final triumph of the artistic sense naturally revealed itself in expression; the conventional words and epithets were really doomed from the time of "Grongar Hill" and "The Seasons," and a new language was gradually forged to express the fresh, vivid perceptions peculiar to each poet, according as his senses interpreted for him the face of the world.

A second variety of eighteenth century diction, or, more strictly speaking, another conventional embellishment of the poetry of the period, is found in that widespread use of personified abstraction which is undoubtedly one of the greatest, perhaps *the* greatest, of its faults. Not only the mere versifiers, but also many of its greatest poets, make abundant use of cut and dried personifications, whose sole claim to vitality rests most often on the presence of a capital letter. It is a favourite indulgence of the writers,

not only of the old order, but also of those who, like Collins and Gray, announce the advent of the new, and not even the presence of genius could prevent its becoming a poetical abuse of the worst kind. Whether it be regarded as a survival of a symbolic system from which the life had long since departed, or as a conventional device arising from the theory of poetical ornament handed down by the neo-classicists, its main effect was to turn a large proportion of eighteenth century poetry into mere rhetorical verse. It is this variety of poetical language that might with justice be labelled as the eighteenth century style in the derogatory sense of the term. In its cumulative effect on the poetry of the period it is perhaps more vicious than the stock diction which is the usual target of criticism.

Two other varieties of eighteenth century diction represent an endeavour to replace, or rather reinforce the stereotyped words, phrases, and similes by new forms. The first of these is the widespread use of latinized words and constructions, chiefly in the blank verse poems written in imitation of Milton, but not only there. The second is the use of archaic and pseudo-archaic words by the writers whose ambition it was to catch something of the music and melody of the Spenserian stanza. Both these movements thus reflected the desire for a change, and though the tendencies, which they reflect, are in a certain sense conventional and imitative in that they simply seek to replace the accepted diction by new forms derived respectively from Milton and Spenser, one of them at least had in the sequel a real and revivifying influence on the language of poetry.

The pedantic and cumbrous terms, which swarm in the majority of the Miltonic imitations, were artificial creations, rarely imbued with any trace of poetic power. Where they do not actually arise from

deliberate attempts to imitate the high Miltonic manner, they probably owe their appearance to more or less conscious efforts to make the new blank verse as attractive as possible to a generation of readers accustomed to the polished smoothness of the couplet. Though such terms linger on until the time of Cowper, and even invade the works of Wordsworth himself, romanticism utterly rejected them, not only because of a prejudice in favour of "Saxon simplicity," but also because such artificial formations lacked almost completely that mysterious power of suggestion and association in which lies the poetical appeal of words. Wordsworth, it is true, could win from them real poetic effects, and so occasionally could Thomson, but in the main they are even more dead and dreary than the old abstract diction of the neo-classicals.

The tendency towards archaism was much more successful in this respect, because it was based on a firmer foundation. In harking back to "the poet's poet," the eighteenth century versifiers were at least on a right track, and though it was hardly possible, even with the best of them, that more than a faint simulacrum of the music and melody of the "Faerie Queene" could be captured merely by drawing drafts on Spenser's diction, yet they at least helped to blaze a way for the great men who were to come later. The old unknown writers of the ballads and Spenser and the Elizabethans generally were to be looked upon as treasure trove to which Keats and Scott and Beddoes and many another were constantly to turn in their efforts to revivify the language of poetry, to restore to it what it had lost of freshness and vigour and colour.

The varieties or embellishments of poetical diction, which have just been characterized, represent the special language of eighteenth century poetry, as distinct from that large portion of language which is

common alike to prose and poetry. For it is scarcely necessary to remind ourselves that by far the largest portion of the poetry of the eighteenth century (as indeed of any century) is written in the latter sort of language, which depends for its effects mainly upon the arrangement of the words, rather than for any unique power in the words themselves. In this kind of poetical diction, it is not too much to say that the eighteenth century is pre-eminent, though the effect of the Wordsworthian criticism has led to a certain failure or indisposition to recognize the fact. Just as Johnson and his contemporaries do not give direct expression to any approval of the admirable language, of which Pope and some of his predecessors had such perfect command, so modern criticism has not always been willing to grant it even bare justice, though Coleridge's penetrating insight had enabled him, as we have seen, to pay his tribute to " the almost faultless position and choice of words, in Mr. Pope's *original* compositions, particularly in his Satires and Moral Essays." It was, we may imagine, the ordinary everyday language, heightened by brilliance and point, in which Pope and his coterie carried on their dallyings and bickerings at Twickenham and elsewhere, and it was an ideal vehicle, lucid and precise for the argument and declamation it had to sustain. But it was more than that, as will be readily recognized if we care to recall some of the oft-quoted lines which amply prove with what consummate skill Pope, despite the economy and condensation imposed by the requirements of the closed couplet, could evoke from this plain and unadorned diction effects of imagination and sometimes even of passion. Such lines as

He stooped to Truth and moralised his song,

or

In lazy apathy let stoics boast
Their virtue fixed : 'tis fixed as in a frost,

or

In Folly's cup still laughs the bubble joy,

and dozens similar, show the lucidity, energy, and imaginative picturesqueness with which Pope could endow his diction when the occasion required it.[1] Such language is the " real language of men " ; nearly every word would satisfy the Wordsworthian canon.

And the same thing is true to a large extent of the poets, who are usually considered as having taken Pope for their model. Whenever there is a real concentration of interest, whenever they are dealing with the didactic and moral questions characteristic of the " age of prose and reason," whenever they are writing of man and of his doings, his thoughts and moods as a social member of civilized society, their language is, as a rule, adequate, vivid, fresh, because the aim then is to present a general thought in the language best adapted to bring it forcibly before the mind of the reader. Here, as has been justly said,[2] rhetoric has passed under the influence and received the transforming force of poetry. " The best rhetorical poetry of the eighteenth century is not the best poetry, but it is poetry in its own way, exhibiting the glow, the rush, the passion which strict prose cannot, and which poetry can, give." Judged on the basis of this kind of poetical diction, the distinctions usually drawn between the neo-classical " kind " of language in the eighteenth century and the romantic " kind " all tend to disappear ; at the head (though perhaps we should go back to the Dryden of the " Religio Laici " and

[1] Cf. " Works " (1889), ed. Courthope and Elwin, Vol. V., p. 360–364.

[2] George Saintsbury, " Eighteenth Century Poetry " (" The London Mercury," December, 1919, pp. 155–163); an article in which a great authority once again tilts an effective lance on behalf of the despised Augustans.

"The Hind and the Panther") is the "Essay on Criticism"; in the direct line of descent are Akenside's "Epistle to Curio," large portions of "The Seasons," "The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," "The Vanity of Human Wishes," the "Deserted Village," and at the end of the century, the "Village" of Crabbe. And in another *genre*, but just as good in its own way, is that light verse, as it may perhaps best be called, successfully ushered in, at the very beginning of the century, by John Pomfret's "The Choice," and brought to perfection by Matthew Prior in his lines "To a Child of Quality," and many another piece.

Nor must it be forgotten that there is a large amount of eighteenth century minor poetry which, whilst reflecting in the main the literary tendency of the age in its fondness for didactic verse, presented in the guise of interminably long and dull epics and epistles, yet reveals to us, if we care to make the pilgrimage through the arid stretches of Anderson's "British Poets," or Dodsley's "Collection of Poets by Several Hands," or Bell's "Fugitive Poetry," or similar collections, the simple, unambitious works of poets more or less unknown when they wrote and now for the most part forgotten, who, unconscious or ignorant of the accepted rules and regulations of their time, wrote because they felt they must, and thus had no care to fetter themselves with the bondage of the "classical" diction.[1] Their range was limited, but they were able to express their thoughts and fancies, their little idylls and landscapes in plain English without any

[1] The best of them have been garnered by Mr. Iola A. Williams into a little volume, "By-ways Round Helicon" (London, 1922), where the interested reader may browse with much pleasure and profit, and where he will no doubt find not a little to surprise and delight him. For a still more complete anthology, *vide* "The Shorter Poems of the Eighteenth Century" (1923) by the same editor. But for the devil's advocacy see Doughty, "English Lyric in the Age of Reason" (London, 1922)

trimmings, akin in its unaffected diction and simplicity of syntax to the language of the genuine old ballads, which were so largely and, for the most part, ineffectively, if not ludicrously, imitated throughout the eighteenth century.

The Augustan age, then, was not without honour, even in poetry, where, looking back after Romanticism had won and consolidated its greatest triumphs, it would seem everything had gone wrong, there was not a little from which the rebels themselves might well have profited. Nowadays we are accustomed, perhaps too often, to think of the Romantic forerunners, the poet of "The Seasons," and Gray, and Collins, and Goldsmith, and the rest, as lonely isolated outposts in hostile territory. So they were to a large extent, but they could not, of course, altogether escape the form and pressure of their age; and what we now admire in them, and for which we salute them as the heralds of the Romantic dawn, is that which shows them struggling to set themselves free from the "classical" toils, and striving to give expression to the new ideas and ideals that were ultimately to surge and sing themselves to victory. It is scarcely necessary to recall many a well-known passage, in which, within a decade of the death of Pope, or even before the mid-century, these new ideas and ideals had found expression in language which really sounded the death-knell of the old diction. Fine sounds, Keats within a few decades was to proclaim exultantly, were then to be heard "floating wild about the earth," but already as early as Collins and Gray, and even now and then in "The Seasons," words of infinite appeal and suggestiveness were stealing back into English poetry.

And this leads us to a consideration of the poetic diction of the eighteenth century from a more general standpoint. For no discussion of poetical language

can be complete unless an attempt is made to consider the question in its entirety with a view to the question of what really constitutes poetic diction, what it is that gives to words and phrases, used by certain poets in certain contexts, a magic force and meaning. The history of poetic diction from the very beginning of English literature down to present times has yet to be written, and it would be a formidable task. Perhaps a syndicate of acknowledged poets would be the only fit tribunal to pass judgment on so vital an aspect of the craft, but even then we suspect there would be a good deal of dissension, and probably more than one minority report. But the general aspects of the question have formed a fruitful field of discussion since Wordsworth launched his theories [1] and thus began a controversy as to the exact nature of poetic language, the echoes of which, it would seem, have not yet died away. For the Prefaces were, it may be truly said, the first great and definite declaration of principle concerning a question which has been well described as "the central one in the philosophy of literature, What is, or rather what is not, poetic diction?"[2]

Judged from this wider standpoint, the diction of the "classical" poetry of the eighteenth century, and even of a large portion of the verse that announces the ultimate Romantic triumph, seems to have marked limitations. The widespread poverty and sterility of this diction was not, of course, merely the result of an inability to draw inspiration from Nature, or of a failure to realize the imaginative possibilities of words

[1] The fountain head of all such studies is, of course, the "Biographia Literaria," for which see especially Shawcross's edition, 1907, Vol. II, pp. 287–297. Of recent general treatises, Lascelles Abercrombie, "Poetry and Contemporary Speech" (1914); Vernon Lee, "The Handling of Words" (1923); Ogden and Richards, "The Meaning of Meaning" (1923), may be mentioned.

[2] Elton, "Survey of English Literature" (1780–1830), Vol. II, pp. 88 foll.

and phrases: it was, it would almost seem, the inevitable outcome and reflex of an age that, despite great and varied achievements, now appears to us narrow and restricted in many vital aspects. If poetry is a criticism of life, in the sense in which Matthew Arnold doubtless meant his dictum to be taken, the age of Pope and his successors is not "poetic"; in many respects it is a petty and tawdry age—the age of the coffee-house and the new press, of the club and the coterie. There are great thinkers like Hume, great historians like Gibbon, great teachers and reformers like John Wesley; but these names and a few others seem only to throw into stronger light the fact that it was on its average level an age of talk rather than of thought, of "fickle fancy" rather than of imaginative flights, of society as a unit highly organized for the pursuit of its own pastimes, pleasures, and preoccupations, in which poetry, and literature generally, played a social part. Poetry seems to skim gracefully over the surface of life, lightly touching many things in its flight, but never soaring; philosophy and science and satire all come within its purview, but when the eternally recurring themes of poetry [1]—love and nature and the like—are handled, there is rarely or never poignancy or depth.

The great elemental facts and thoughts and feelings of life seldom confront us in the literature of the century as we make our way down the decades; even in the forerunners of the Romantic revolt we are never really stirred. "The Seasons," and "The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," touch responsive chords, but are far from moving us to thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls. Not until Blake and Burns is the veneer of convention and artificiality, in both matter and manner, definitely cast aside, and there is to be caught in English verse again, not only the

[1] Cf. Elton, "The Augustan Ages" (1899), p. 209.

authentic singing note, but, what is more, the recognition and exemplification of the great truth that the finest poetry most often has its "roots deep in the common stuff," and it is not to be looked for in an age and environment when, with rationality apparently triumphant, men seemed careless of the eternal verities, of the thoughts and feelings that lie too deep for tears, or sadly recognized their impotence, or their frustrated desires, to image them forth in poetry.

"What is it," asks Gilbert Murray,[1] "that gives words their character and makes a style high or low? Obviously, their associations: the company they habitually keep in the minds of those who use them. A word which belongs to the language of bars and billiard-saloons will become permeated by the normal standard of mind prevalent in such places; a word which suggests Milton or Carlyle will have the flavour of those men's minds about it. I therefore cannot resist the conclusion that if the language of Greek poetry has, to those who know it intimately, this special quality of keen austere beauty, it is because the minds of the poets who used that language were habitually toned to a higher level both of intensity and of nobility than ours. It is a finer language because it expresses the mind of finer men. By 'finer men' I do not necessarily mean men who behaved better, either by our standards or by their own: I mean the men to whom the fine things of the world, sunrise and sea and stars, and the love of man for man, and strife and the facing of evil for the sake of good, and even common things like meat and drink, and evil things like hate and terror had, as it were, a keener edge than they have for us, and roused a swifter and nobler reaction." This passage has been

[1] "The Legacy of Greece" (Oxford, 1921), p. 11.

quoted in full because it may be said to have a direct and definite bearing on the question of the average level of poetic language during the greater part of the eighteenth century: there were few or no *trouvailles*, no great discoveries, no sudden releasings of the magic power often lurking unsuspectedly in the most ordinary words, because the poets and versifiers for the most part had all gone wrong in their conception of the medium they essayed to mould. "The substance of poetry," writes Professor Lowes,[1] "is also the very stuff of words. And in its larger sense as well the language of poetry is made up inevitably of symbols—of symbols for things in terms of other things, for things in terms of feelings, for feelings in terms of things. It is the language not of objects, but of the complex relations of objects. And the agency that moulds it is the ceaselessly active power that is special to poetry only in degree—*imagination*—that fuses the familiar and the strange, the thing I feel and the thing I see, the world within and the world without, into a *tertium quid* that interprets both." The eighteenth century was not perhaps so emphatically and entirely the "age of prose and reason" as is sometimes thought, but it could scarcely be called the "age of imagination," and poetry, in its highest sense ("high poetry," as Maeterlinck would call it), being of imagination all compact, found no abiding place there.

Most words, we may say, potentially possess at least two or more significations, their connotative scope varying according to the knowledge or culture of the speaker or reader. First of all, there is the logical, their plain workaday use, we might call it; and next, and above and beyond all this, they have, so to speak, an exciting force, a power of stimulating and reviving in the mind and memory all the associations that

[1] "Convention and Revolt in Poetry" (London, 1921), p. 13.

cluster around them. Nearly all words carry with them, in vastly varying degrees, of course, this power of evocation, so that even commonplace terms, words, and phrases hackneyed and worn thin by unceasing usage, may suddenly be invested with a strange and beautiful suggestiveness when they are pressed into the service of the highest poetic imagination. And in the same way the æsthetic appeal of words of great potential value is reinforced and strengthened, when in virtue of their context, or even merely of the word or words to which they are attached, they are afforded a unique opportunity of flashing forth and bringing into play all the mysterious powers and associations gathered to themselves during a long employment in prose and verse, or on the lips of the people :

> All the charm of all the muses
> often flowering in a lonely word.

Poetry of the highest value and appeal may be, and often is, as we know from concrete examples that flash into the mind, written in commonplace, every-day terms, and we ask ourselves how it is done.[1] There are the mysterious words of the dying Hamlet :

> The rest is silence,

or the line quoted by Matthew Arnold[2] as an instance

[1] Just as this book was about to go to press, there appeared " The Theory of Poetry," by Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, in which a poet and critic of great distinction has embodied his thoughts on his own art. Chaps. III and IV especially should be consulted for a most valuable account and analysis of how the poetical " magic " of words is achieved.

[2] " Essays in Criticism," Second Series (1888) : " Wordsworth " (1913 ed.), p. 157.

when Wordsworth's practice is to be found illustrating his theories :

> And never lifted up a single stone,

or the wonderful lines which seem to bring with them a waking vision of the beauty of the English countryside, radiant with the promise of Spring :

> daffodils,
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty,

In these and many similar passages, which the reader will recall for himself, it would seem that the mere juxtaposition of more or less plain and ordinary words has led to such action and reaction between them as to charge each with vastly increased powers of evocation and suggestion, to which the mind of the reader, roused and stimulated, instinctively responds.

Similarly, the satisfaction thus afforded to our æsthetic sense, or our emotional appreciation, is often evoked by a happy conjunction of epithet and noun placed together in a new relation, instantly recognized as adding an unsuspected beauty to an otherwise colourless word. The poets and versifiers of the eighteenth century were not particularly noteworthy for their skill or inspiration in the matter of the choice of epithet, but the genius of Blake, in this as in other respects of poetic achievement, raised him " above the age " and led him to such felicities of expression as in the last stanza of " The Piper " :

> And I made a *rural pen*
> And I stained the water clear,

where, as has been aptly remarked,[1] a common-

[1] O. Barfield, " Form in Poetry " (" New Statesman " August 7, 1920, pp. 501–2).

place epithet is strangely and, apparently discordantly, joined to an equally commonplace noun, and yet the discord, in virtue of the fact that it sets the mind and memory working to recover or recall the faint ultimate associations of the two terms, endows the phrase with infinite suggestiveness. In the same way a subtle and magic effect is often produced by inversion of epithet, when the adjective is placed after instead of before the noun, and this again is a practice or device little favoured in the eighteenth century; the supremacy of the stopped couplet and its mechanical requirements were all against it.

But the eighteenth century had little of this magic power of evocation; the secret had departed with the blind Milton, and it was not till the Romantic ascendancy had firmly established itself, not until Keats and Shelley and their great successors, that English poetry was once more able so to handle and fashion and rearrange words as to win from them their total and most intense associations. Yet contemporary criticism, especially in France, had not failed altogether to appreciate this potential magic of words. Diderot, for instance, speaks of the magic power that Homer and other great poets have given to many of their words; such words are, in his phrase, "hieroglyphic paintings," that is, paintings not to the eye, but to the imagination.[1] What we feel about all the so-called classical verse of the eighteenth century, as well as of a good deal of the earlier Romantic poetry, is that writers have not been able to devise these subtle hieroglyphics; lack of real poetical inspiration, or the pressure of the prosaic and unimaginative atmosphere of their times, has led to a general poverty in the words or phrases that evoke

[1] "Œuvres" (ed. Assézat), I, p. 377 (quoted by Babbitt), *op. cit.*, p. 121.

some object before the inner eye, or charm the ear by an unheard melody, terms that, like the magic words of Keats, or the evanescent imagery of Shelley, stir us both emotionally and æsthetically. The verse of Pope and his followers is not without something of this power, but here the effect is achieved by the skill and polish with which the words are selected and grouped within the limits of the heroic couplet. Crabbe had marked down, accurately enough, this lack of word-power in his description of Dryden's verse as " poetry in which the force of expression and accuracy of description have neither needed nor obtained assistance from the fancy of the writer," and again, more briefly, as " poetry without an atmosphere."[1] One negative indication of this " nudity " is the comparative poverty of eighteenth century poetry in new compound epithets, those felicitous terms which have added to the language some of its most poetical and pictorial phrases.

The Prefaces of Wordsworth and the kindred comments and remarks of Coleridge were not, it is hardly necessary to say, in themselves powerful enough to effect an instant and complete revolution in poetical theory and practice. But it was all to the good that inspired craftsmen were at last beginning to worry themselves about the nature and quality of the material which they had to mould and fashion and combine into poetry ; still more important was it that they were soon to have the powerful aid of fellow-workers like Shelley and Keats, whose practice was to reveal the magic lurking in words and phrases, so arranged and combined as to set them reverberating in the depths of our sensibility. And, on the side of form at least, this is the distinctively Romantic achievement ; the æsthetic possibilities and poten-

[1] Preface to " The Tales " (Poems), ed. A. W. Ward, Cambridge, 1906), Vol. II, p. 10.

tialities of the whole of our language, past and present, were entrancingly revealed and magnificently exemplified; new and inexhaustible mines of poetical word-power were thus opened up, and the narrow and conventional limits of the diction within which the majority of the eighteenth century poets had "tallied" their verses were transcended and swept away.

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